NF

ISSUE #45: A WALK WITH THE ANIMALS

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: RESCUE TEAM DX

THE HISTORY OF ANIMAL CROSSING

BYLETH JOINS **SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE**

TRIALS OF MANA

SNACK WORLD: THE DUNGEON CRAWL – **GOLD**

POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD EXPANSION PASS

BEAST FRIENDS FOREVER

SHOVEL KNIGHT: KING OF CARDS

SHOVEL KNIGHT SHOWDOWN

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: THE MOVIE

GAME BOY DEMAKES

VITAMIN CONNECTION

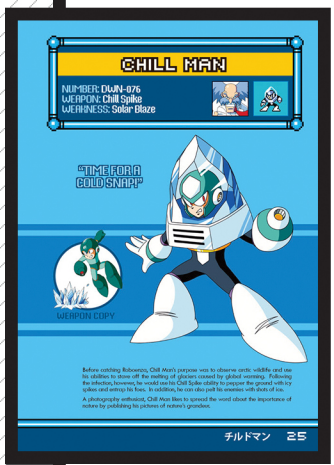
MARCH/ APRIL 2020

A MEGA UPGRADE

DO YOU KNOW your bots? Can you tell Fire Man from Flame Man? Could you identify Beat, Rush and Tango on the spot? Whether you answered yes or no, the Mega Man Robot Master Field Guide is for you!

Originally released back in 2012, this combination art book and tome of lore was authored by NF's own David and Nadia Oxford – and it's got a new version coming on March 24! The Updated Edition expands on the Oxfords' original work by adding in robo profiles for the new boss bots from Mega Man 11, like Block Man, Bounce Man and Torch Man. What's more, this new Updated Edition of the Field Guide is being produced in hardcover! (I'm sure Hard Man would approve of that.)

Take a glance at the handful of page previews placed just below, then head to your favorite online retailer and place a preorder! The MSRP for this release is $29.99, but you should be able to snag a copy for cheaper than that depending on which shop you choose. (As of this writing, Amazon has it for just $23.20.) Thanks for supporting the work of our Mega teammates! **– LUCAS**



(Who's your favorite Robot Master of all? I'm a Gyro Man man myself. He even made the cover!)

ISSUE #45:
A WALK WITH
THE ANIMALS

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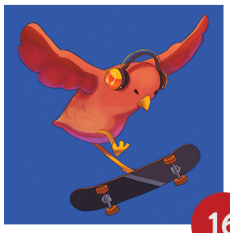
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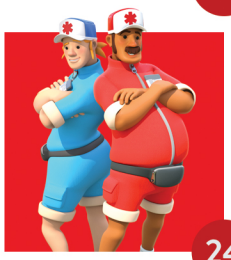
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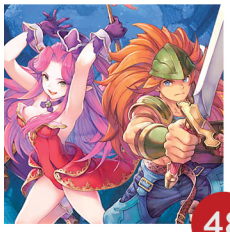
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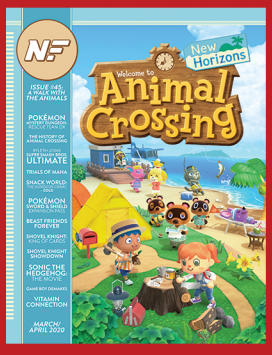
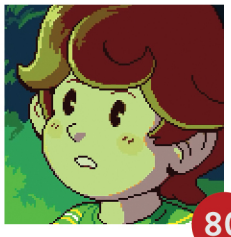


ON THE COVER

It's another first for the Nintendo Force! We said no to New Leaf. We passed on Pocket Camp. We actually did print a poster for Happy Home Designer, but still, that spin-off didn't earn the spotlight either. (And neither did amiibo Festival. I'm sure you're shocked.) But finally, at long last, the first new Animal Crossing game to ever earn an NF issue cover position is here: New Horizons! We think we made a wise choice after all these years of waiting, and the reasons why are waiting for you inside this issue!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MARCH/
APRIL 2020

INBOX

CREATURE FEATURES

"If we could walk with the animals, talk with the animals, grunt and squeak and squawk with the animals, and they could squeak and squawk and speak and talk to us . . . what a neat achievement that would be!"

Ah, friends! It's finally here. At long, *looooong* last, the Animal Crossing series – the mainline, proper Animal Crossing series, not a spin-off – is finally coming back to our television screens. It's been 3,000 years!

. . . Well, more like 11 and a half. I'll let our History of Animal Crossing feature article deal with the dates more precisely. What I'm getting at is that the gap has felt much longer!

I blame the Wii U! I know, I know. The Switch is three years old now and it's probably shameful to still be bashing its predecessor at this point, but the fact remains that the Wii U never got a proper Animal Crossing sequel of its own – and that's probably because its early years of other software didn't build up enough of a user base to justify it.

Or maybe the lack of a real Animal Crossing is what doomed the Wii U to begin with! Ack, it's hard to say. My mind is a whole messy barrel of monkeys trying to sort the whole situation out.

Speaking of monkeys, how about those animals, huh? Regardless of how it happened, New Horizons is now just over the horizon for the Switch, and with the return of the series that lets you walk with the animals and talk with the animals, we've felt compelled to craft creature features to fill this latest edition of NF. In addition to the aforementioned full History of Animal Crossing, we're also bringing you Beast Friends Forever, a nostalgic look back at some of our favorite animal buddies from over the years. (It's not to be confused with Best Friend Forever, a dog-owning/date-seeking sim previewed in the Download section.) You'll also find animal-related games being reviewed both there and in the retail-focused Reviews section later in the issue, some animal comics sprinkled about and even an interview with the makers of Gato Roboto. Because what's better than a cat? A cat suiting up in mech armor!

I know so many of you have been looking forward to the arrival of Animal Crossing: New Horizons. I'm right there with you! I'm thrilled that we can present this issue and help support the hype for what looks to be a great all-new series sequel!

Lucas M. Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #44: JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2020

2020 has been off to a slow start for the Switch, since the biggest first-party release to this point has been a re-release of a Wii U game. The long, bleak winter is just about to give way to a gorgeous, sunny spring with the long-awaited arrival of an all-new Animal Crossing, though! We kicked off our own hype cycle for the sequel with our Player's Poll questions in our last issue. First up, we wanted to hear your personal Animal Crossing tales! When did you first experience the series? What was something funny that happened while playing? Next, we asked you to play zookeeper and hypothetically introduce a fresh species of creature into the AC world. We've already got dogs, cats, eagles, deer . . . what other corner of the animal kingdom should be represented? Finally, a hype check. Will you buy New Horizons? Your responses:

LETTERS

New Horizons will definitely be a Day 1 purchase for me. It's actually the reason I bought my Nintendo Switch in the first place. Around the time the Switch launched, I told my college roommate that I would get one if they ever announced a new Animal Crossing game for it. Fast forward to September of 2018, when they teased the next AC game, and I ordered my Switch the next day. This will be the biggest release of 2020 for me, by far! **– CAMERON ASBURY**

My first time in Animal Crossing started with the first game on GameCube. Though kinda funny depending how you look at it, me and my sister used to send incriminating letters to animals we didn't want living in our village (that'll teach them to give me cheap furniture). The funny thing is, despite us doing that they would almost always send us presents back telling us how awesome we are.

One species I'm surprised isn't in the series is snakes. I think the developers could create really creative ways to make snakes proper citizens and it would be really fun to see how they do it. Snakes deserve a chance.

Finally, I am utterly excited about New Horizons and have it pre-ordered. I plan on spending the whole day playing on Day 1. Unless Nintendo gives us more Metroid news or remasters Thousand Year Door (shout-out to Arlo), as of now it's definitely set to be my Game of the Year for 2020 (as early as that is).
– WILLIAM CRAFT
I'd like to see snakes in shirts, sure.

My first Animal Crossing experience was with the GameCube original, and something funny that happened to me in-game was it taking me a solid week of playing to really click with the premise. I legit didn't understand that the idea was just to have fun, live an animal life and eventually pay off my home loan. I kept looking for the "point" until I finally understood it!

I want more types of cats in Animal Crossing! Like, give me some very clearly distinct kitty breeds to befriend, rather than just one all-encompassing "Cat."

I'm very excited for New Horizons! I've got a preorder down already. I put a couple hundred hours into New Leaf, and I'm excited to have more fun with animal pals! **– JASON HUNT**

Hello to all of you at Nintendo Force Magazine. Just got my first-ever issue a few days ago, Issue #44, and I've been absolutely loving it!

I'll be honest, I've never tried the Animal Crossing series before. It's always seemed great and I've heard nothing but good things about it, but I've just never gotten around to picking up any of the games myself. Of course, being a fan of pretty much everything about the Splatoon series, I would have to say that it would be most interesting to see a squid species make its way into the Animal Crossing series. Especially since I've heard that the two series are developed by the same team, it'd be fun to see them reference the culture and story of the Splatoon games in some way.

ON THE COVER

Fire Emblem returns to the cover of NF for the first time since our debut, exactly seven years ago! . . . Well, sort of. Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE started out as a Fire Emblem and Shin Megami Tensei crossover game, but it does so many new things that it hardly resembles either of its inspirations any more! You'll learn more in the pages ahead. Also, though Chrom isn't normally a part of the TMS#FE key art, we had to toss him in there at the bottom. More seven-year symmetry that way, you see!

ERROR REPORT

Time to issue an apology for a minor mistake that probably went unnoticed by almost all of you, but which is bothersome enough to this Editor-in-Chief that I feel the need to make amends! I've called in NF's corrections officer Error to help me own up to my oversight. In our last issue's "On the Cover" box on Page 3, I erroneously stated that the Fire Emblem series had not been represented on the cover of an NF issue since our Issue #1. That's clearly false, as just a few issues ago, last July, we had Fire Emblem: Three Houses in the spotlight! I guess there was just something about that game that made it disappear from my brain as soon as I finished playing it — perhaps I was unconsciously steeling myself against the possibility of Byleth joining Smash. (Bad news there too!)

I'm definitely planning to buy New Horizons, though I'm usually not one to buy games on Day 1, so maybe I'll be buying it a week or two after release. It'll be great to finally try out this series that I've heard so many great things about! **— AIDEN MACLENNAN**

Welcome to the Force, Aiden! Happy to have you!

I am very excited for Animal Crossing: New Horizons because I have played Animal Crossing for most of my life. Animal Crossing is such a fun game — when I am feeling sad or down I play it and it uplifts me. If I could buy it on Day 1 I really would. Animal Crossing: New Horizons looks so fun and I am very excited. I fell in love with Animal Crossing: Wild World and played every one since. Animal Crossing: New Horizons will be a great addition to the Animal Crossing franchise and I simply can't wait. **— HANNAH N.**

I was at my Nina's, and she gave me a DSi along with Wild World. At first, I left the game untouched, but then I picked it up. It was funny when Tangy said, "Why are you walking on your tiptoes? There! Nothing to fear on my floor!", and then stepped in a drink she had spilled.

I would add Dunsparce! And there would be a new personality, "whatever-the-opposite-of-dopey-is", which all Dunsparce would be!

Of course I am excited! The fifth major game in a Nintendo series is always great (Ocarina of Time is proof)! But, we're pretty poor, so I probably couldn't buy it for a while. **— BRENNON SYDEBOTHOM**

Dunsparce is the "Land Snake" Pokémon, so I'm just going to count that as another vote for adding snakes to the series.

My first experience with Animal Crossing was trying it out on the GameCube. Maybe I was allured by the free memory card, but after firing it up and playing for a while I was hooked. I was so stoked when I uncovered NES game consoles that I could set up in my house and play old-school Nintendo games — that was the coolest, and probably the nail in the coffin of making me a lifelong fan. **— MARTIN SCHMITZ**

Could we please have some dodos? They're one of my favorite animals! Don't let the extinction thing hold them back. In a world that has pocket sharks, money trees and actual wish granting, they'd fit right in. **— ALEX WINTER**

You're in luck, Alex! New Horizons is introducing the all-new Dodo Airlines, owned and operated by your preferred kind of bird!

The first Animal Crossing game I ever played was City Folk on the Wii, but I had a bit more of an "interesting experience" in New Leaf. For the longest time in that game, I lived a nice, peaceful life just like most players — until Sylvia the Kangaroo moved in right next door to me. At first, she seemed to be just another standard villager . . . but I was very wrong. One day, she entered my house and proceeded to insult every single one of my possessions by labeling them all as "garbage." From then on, Sylvia continued to pester and offend me at any time she saw fit, and she never moved away! **— MICHAEL WYLIE**

Yikes!

There are tons and tons of animals in the series. I've always liked Aziz the Lion from the first game. But if I could pick a brand-new animal, I'd choose a snake. Or maybe a squid too! **— ALBERTO VILLASENOR**

I think snakes have officially won this unofficial NF opinion poll!

I'll be buying Animal Crossing at launch, only one day before my wedding, and playing it with my wife all the way to our honeymoon. **— JOHN KNUDSEN**

Enjoy your new life together! Both on the island and in the real world!

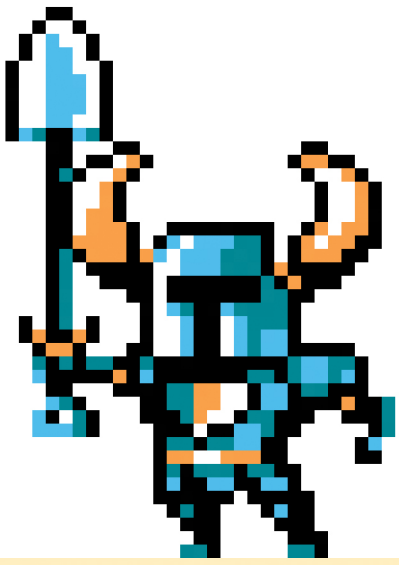
DON'T ANGER THE OX

Hey Ox,

What do you think would be a good way to change the eShop so people can wade through the shovelware? It's a chore to sort through the mobile ports and under-a-dollar games, and I'm curious what ideas are out there.

— @THE_BEARDIEST

Give everyone their own personal Shovel Knight to help shovel through the shovelware. Worst case scenario, everyone gets their own Shovel Knight, and I think that counts as a win.



THE OX MET THE HEDGEHOG

. . . and it seems they became fast friends! Yes, that's NF's own David Oxford tossing up the thumbs-up next to everyone's favorite super-speedster Sega superstar. Or at least the newest version of him! Tracking the evolution at work here, I believe we go from video game Sonic to failed CGI Sonic to second-attempt, actually accepted CGI Sonic to human-sized cosplay costume of that newer movie Sonic. Keeping everything straight may be difficult, but for further clarification about everything that's gone on with Sonic the Hedgehog's silver screen debut, please direct your attention to David's review! (Page 66!)

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Hannah N.**, the winner of last issue's Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions concerning a certain kind of Chronicle!

QUESTION #1

What's your personal history with the Xenoblade series? Were you there for the fight to release the first game on Wii? Did you come along later?

QUESTION #2

How about RPGs overall? What's your favorite RPG ever? Why? Or have you perhaps not played many? If so, why not?

QUESTION #3

Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition is a total visual overall of a Wii game. What other Wii titles should get the same treatment?

Email your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #46" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a brand-new copy of Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition!

NINTENDO FORCE

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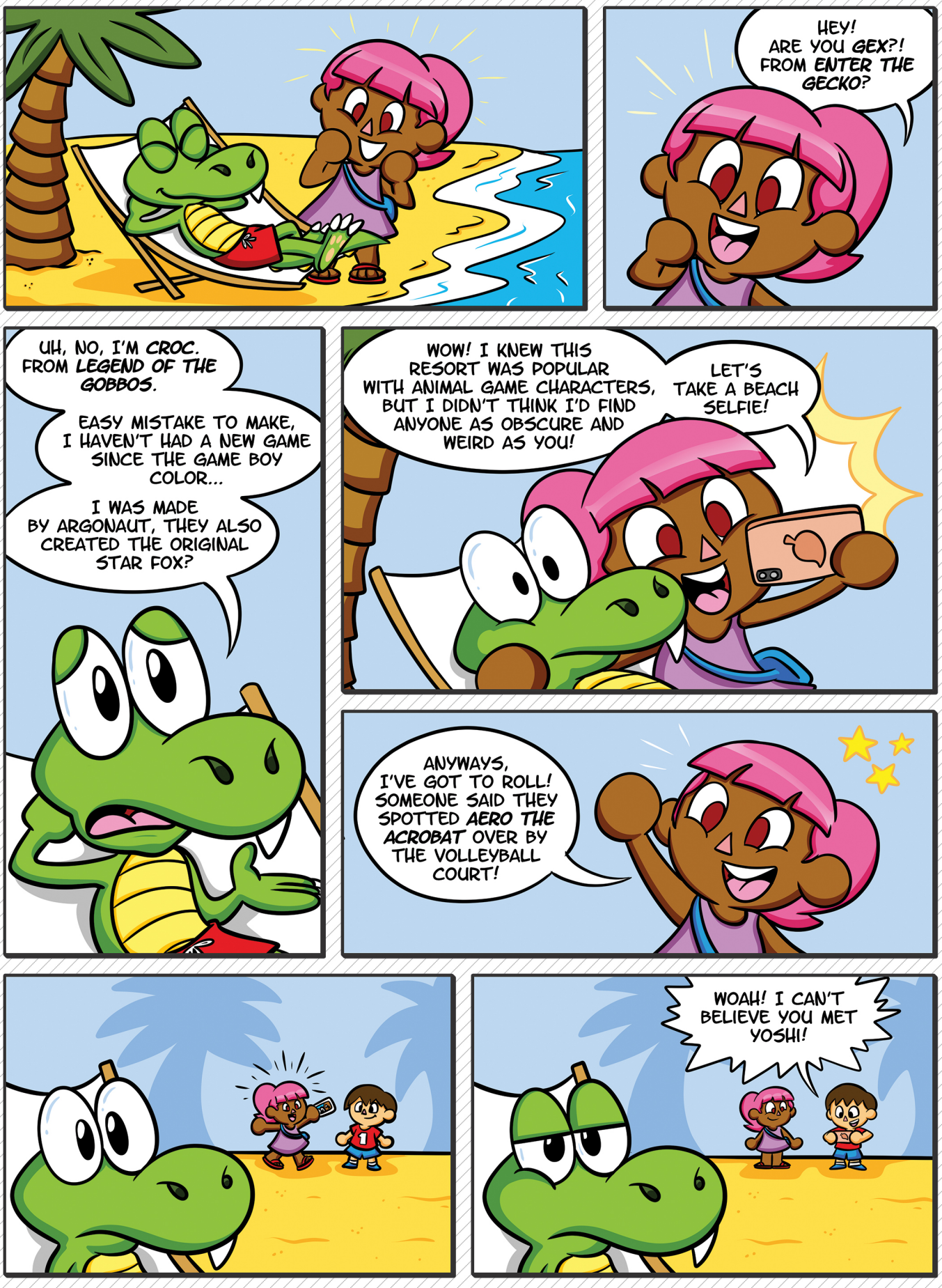


BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

NEWS

FAREWELL, KOBE

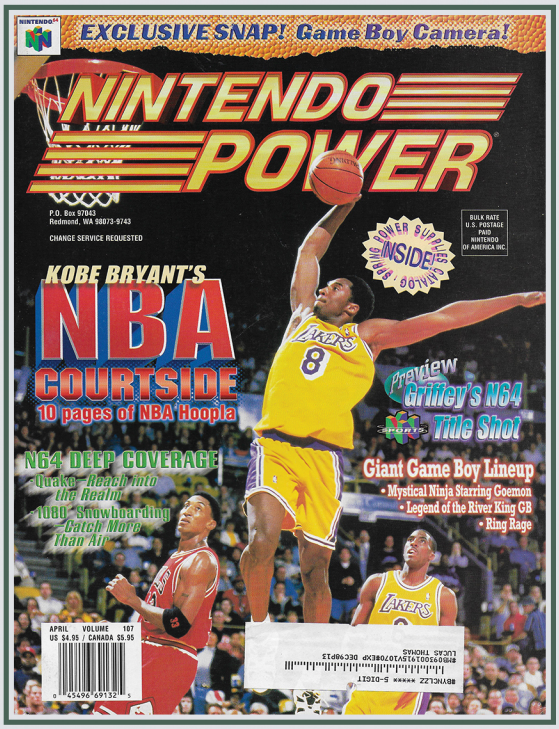
The world has lost an NBA (and Nintendo) icon.

A HELICOPTER CRASH has claimed the life of a legend.

Tragedy struck on Sunday, January 26, when a helicopter carrying Kobe Bryant fell from the sky and collided with a hillside in Calabasas, California, just outside Los Angeles. All nine people on board were lost in the crash – including, even more heartbreakingly, Kobe's 13-year-old daughter Gianna. The two were traveling together to a basketball game to be held in nearby Thousand Oaks – Kobe served as coach for Gianna's team. The exact cause of the crash has not been identified yet, but heavy fog in the area and the resulting lack of visibility for the helicopter's pilot are almost certainly the biggest contributing factors.

As Kobe was such a high-profile NBA player over his 20-year career, millions around the world have begun grieving his loss. He is inarguably one of the best of all time!

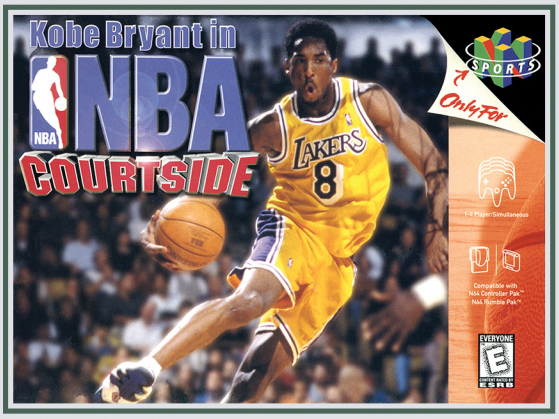
Though much less prominent in the world of video games, Kobe Bryant nonetheless also played a major role in a key era of Nintendo history when he became one of only very few real-world celebrity athletes to headline a first-party Nintendo series. We look back on those games now, as we say goodbye to the Mamba. **– LUCAS**



SOARING INTO ACTION

NINTENDO POWER #107

Kobe first soared onto the Nintendo scene on the cover of the April 1998 issue of Nintendo Power. He was a rising star in the NBA at that time, just finishing up his second season with the Lakers. Though we know now that he went on to become one of the most dominant players ever, his selection as the star to headline Nintendo's new NBA Courtside game might have surprised some at the time, since he was still very young and still establishing himself. He was only 19 when the deal was made! (Not bad, earning his own video game while still being just a teenager!) A few years later, Kobe would also appear on the cover of NP #153.



NINTENDO'S BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION

KOBE BRYANT IN NBA COURTSIDE

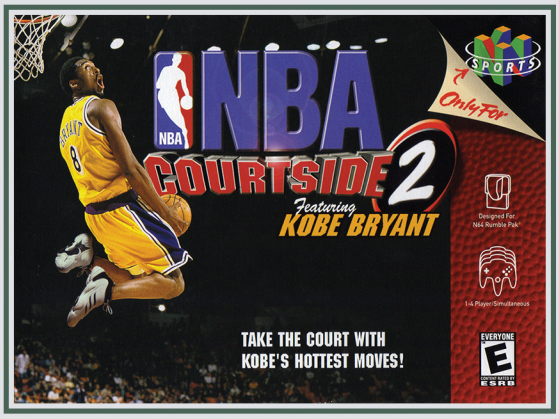
The decision to feature Kobe as the celebrity endorser of NBA Courtside came very late in development — Nintendo Power #107 had him on the cover representing the game, of course, but flipping back to NP #106, you can see the game was still just named "NBA Courtside" with no Kobe in sight. In fact, the name change came so late that Nintendo never did seem to decide exactly what the final name was! The boxart released at retail says "Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside" but the title screen when you boot up the game takes out the "in" and claims you're about to play "Kobe Bryant's NBA Courtside" instead. It's a minor discrepancy, sure, but it's just another piece of evidence pointing to the fact that this endorsement deal was only finalized in the 11th hour.

Also odd was the fact that Nintendo was publishing a serious NBA basketball sim at all! The game was a traditional 5-on-5 simulation of the sport, with full, accurate league rosters and impressive 3D visuals. (For the time, at least.) Kobe actually assisted in the development process, meeting with the dev team and suiting up in head-to-toe motion capture gear, then performing every variety of dribble, pass, shot and dunk he could think of for hours on end. Maybe it was after his hard work with the devs that Nintendo finally decided to put his name on the game?

TAKING THE GAME ON THE GO

NBA 3 ON 3 FEATURING KOBE BRYANT

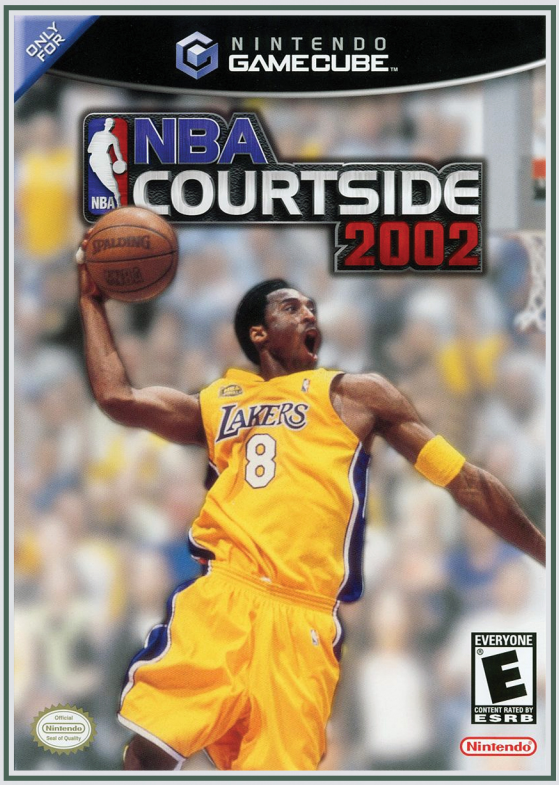
The development team responsible for creating NBA Courtside, Left Field Productions, so impressed Nintendo that the Big N acquired them and set them on the task of making both a sequel and a spin-off. The spin-off was this little-remembered Game Boy Color game, which had little in common with its big brother on the N64 console thanks to the wide divide in technology between the two machines. The GBC couldn't handle a full 5-on-5 NBA sim, so each team got to field three players at a time instead, dribbling up and down a court seen from an isometric perspective. Kobe still greeted you with a grin in the intro, though!



THE SOPHOMORE EFFORT

NBA COURTSIDE 2 FEATURING KOBE BRYANT

A year and a half after his first turn as a Nintendo star in April '98, Kobe hit the N64 again with this sequel in November '99. More shenanigans with the naming convention flip-flopped his endorsement to being secondary, letting "NBA Courtside 2" take the lead as the main name — perhaps Nintendo was looking ahead to a future when a different NBA star might headline the series? Any other endorser likely wouldn't have worked any harder than Kobe did to assist development, though, as he again put in work in a motion capture suit to add new moves like a no-look pass to the mix for this follow-up.



THE END OF THE TRILOGY

NBA COURTSIDE 2002

The idea that Nintendo might have been planning more games without Kobe's involvement gains another point of possibility here, since NBA Courtside 2002 took his name out of the title entirely — though kept him prominently on the box to continue his connection with the brand. The "2002" is a major clue, too, that Nintendo hoped Courtside would carry on as an annual series past this point. Sadly, though, this one GameCube installment ended up being the series' last. Kobe only became an even bigger star beyond '02 and for over a decade beyond this time, so the Big N probably made a big mistake not keeping him on for more sequels!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Bearing the Weight

Banjo lends a paw.

IT'S CRAZY HOW sometimes a merchandise flood can occur years – or even decades – after a game's initial launch, but leave it to Smash to start the deluge! Banjo-Kazooie items are hot right now, and Exquisite Gaming has just released a Banjo-Kazooie figure in their "Cable Guy" line that can hold your game controller, smartphone or even your entire Nintendo Switch, if you like! Banjo excitedly places his hands out to hold whatever you have for him, as Kazooie peers around from behind. (Just to be clear, it doesn't charge controllers or your Switch, etc. But it does come with a USB-C cable just to confuse you!) I love the detail on the figure, especially the nice Rare logo on the back. Most retailers have it for around $30.

Toys for Toddlers

Get 'em started with Mario at a young age!

KAWADA RELEASED A pair of Super Mario-themed toddler toys in January. A "coaster" toy typically has bead trains simulating rollercoasters by traveling along a wire. (You've probably seen one at your doctor's office.) With the Mario toys, they are wooden character cutouts like Mario, Luigi, Toads and power-ups. It appears that Peach and a Toad can roam free on the base. There's even a little teeter-totter they can bounce on, but there are only two wires.

Arguably the more interesting of the pair is a building block set that features various block sizes and arches adorned with popular friends and enemies from the franchise. There are also trademark Question Blocks and bricks so toddlers just getting to know the characters can build scenes. These are between $30 and $40 in Japan, but once shipping hits they can be around $50-$60 each. Perhaps they'll be distributed to other regions at some point, but right now they're import only.

Sous Chef Yoshi

. . . and other new Mario home goods!

THE SUPER MARIO Home and Party set was a big seller, so Nintendo Sales has announced a "Part 2." The last set seemed to focus on a party, but the second set is focusing on the kitchen. This set's main attraction seems to be the Yoshi oven mitt, coming in either a green or light blue variety. It just seems to make sense as a product, like the Piranha Plant slippers from Part 1. Also in this set are Mario hat mug covers or cups with flagpole straws, aprons and table covers featuring scenes from Super Mario Bros. and silicone coasters and trays. I also like the muffin cups in the shapes of Question Blocks or pipes that come with picks to place in the muffins that feature characters or power-ups. Best of all, though? Probably the helpful Bob-omb whose wick has been replaced by a tissue dispenser!

Collector's Corner is compiled by Brett Martin, the world record holder for the largest collection of video game memorabilia on Earth. For more cool collectibles and information on how to order from import shops, visit his site, The Video Game Memorabilia Museum, at videogamemm.com.

Pac Pals

Tamagotchi teams up with Pac-Man.

REMEMBER TAMAGOTCHI? Bandai sure does, and the little needy monsters are making a comeback by adding Pac-Man to their popular monster-raising game. It's more than just a case revamp, but it does have both black and yellow versions and even a deluxe assortment with a Pac-Man cover. The game itself features Pac-Man, his ghosts and minigames like Pac & Catch that use elements from both games. Even the Tamagotchi can be attacked by ghosts that Pac-Man must fend off! The crossover device is $19.99 unless you want the case that's $5 more.

amiibo UPDATE

SO HERE WE ARE. All of the announced amiibo have been released, and nothing new's on the slate. The latest additions were Dark Samus and Richter. Both are significant, as neither had previously had any sort of merchandise released. Dark Samus is especially beautiful, but Richter fans can finally show their love for that Belmont whether they use the Smash functionality or not.

This leaves us in a bit of a predicament. With the latest Nintendo Direct video focused solely on Animal Crossing: New Horizons, we're in an amiibo announcement limbo. Will amiibo still be a thing later in the year? Can I even hope for the next set of Fighters Pass fighters to be converted, or should I place all my efforts on getting the last set plasticized? All signs that we have now point to yes, as the Direct explained that the new Animal Crossing offering will be compatible with all amiibo previously released for Animal Crossing – including the collectible cards! If the software is willing to support older figures, it may be a safe bet that the little figures are still on Nintendo's radar.

But it is odd that they're adding such functionality to a new game without offering some new amiibo to kickstart it. Of course, anyone paying attention to the amiibo craze knows that the winners of the shelf-warming category definitely go to the Animal Crossing crew. In fact, many of the previous releases are so cheap that it would only take a handful of dollars to get them to you, should you need any. There are 16 figures in the AC set, so assembling a full collection is not an unreasonable goal!

For the Capcom Fans

First 4 Figures takes on two more legendary heroes!

FIRST 4 FIGURES has been busy with some Capcom IPs – introducing Amaterasu and Mega Man resin statues! Both have standard, exclusive and definitive versions.

Ammy's statue is called "Divine Descent" and features four different interchangeable weapons in the definitive edition: the Divine Retribution that appears in all versions, Devout Beads, Blade of Kusanagi and the Infinity Judge. All but the Infinity Judge have LED features, where that one has a glow feature. Her definitive edition will set you back $684.99, while the other versions are $150 less. Oddly enough the base model with no LEDs is the same price.

All of Mega Man's statues feature an explosion he's narrowly avoiding, but the definitive edition tells the story. A Missile Cone has fired and accidentally taken out a Met, and you can see a second missile in the background. LEDs in Mega Man's helmet, boots and Mega Buster make his features prominent, and they are also in the explosion and the conveyor belt base. This version is $499.99, $70 more than the exclusive that has just the LED features and the base model with no lights.

Renovations Underway

Big N's beginnings to become a big inn.

BID ADIEU TO to yet another Japanese gaming shrine! The former site of Nintendo Playing Card Co. is being converted into a hotel! Plan Do See, a Tokyo-based hospitality company that imbues historic buildings with fresh purpose, will retrofit the old headquarters with 20 guest suites, a restaurant, gym and spa, ready to welcome visitors by Summer 2021.

The concrete structure that sits in Kyoto's Shimogyo Ward was built in 1933 – where the original 1889 building once stood – then vacated in 1959 after Nintendo relocated. There it stood unchanged over the subsequent 60 years, attracting adventurous fans – yours truly included – who wished to pay respects at the birthplace of a gaming monolith.

Considering that the building is owned not by Nintendo but by its founding family, the Yamauchis, don't expect the hotel to be furnished with Mario memorabilia or to serve Kirby Café cuisine. Regardless, it warms the heart knowing those hallowed doors will soon open for business once again!

"Nintendo infamously operated a chain of love hotels back in the '60s, but that venture was far from successful. That their old office would itself become a hotel seems like karmic retribution! – **TONY**

Atari's Alternative

This one's going to be a little closer to home.

IF FLYING HALFWAY across the world to stay in the new Nintendo hotel is an unreasonable proposition for your time and/or budget, you'll have another video game hotel option to consider instead fairly soon! Atari Hotels are on their way to several cities scattered around the United States.

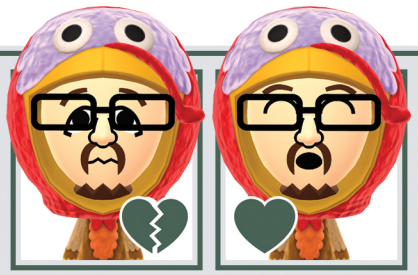
If you're unfamiliar with Atari – which is certainly possible here in the year 2020 – it was the brand name most collectively considered synonmous with video games as a whole in the years before Nintendo came along and claimed that crown with the NES in the mid-'80s. Since Mario and his crew stole the spotlight, the Atari name has struggled to regain the relevance and mindshare it once enjoyed in the '70s and early '80s. And specifying "the Atari name" is important, too, because the brand's been passed to different owners over the decades – the Atari of today is not the same company as the Atari of yesteryear.

Diminished brand recognition aside, the announced plans for this new hotel chain sound intriguing. The hotels will integrate the latest VR and AR technology to "level up" the guest experience (according to their PR), and some of the hotels being built will also include "state-of-the-art venues and studios to accommodate esports events." That's a smart move. Maybe they'll even be able to attract events like Games Done Quick?

The first Atari Hotel will break ground in Phoenix later this year. After that, further locations are planned for Las Vegas, Denver, Chicago, Austin, Seattle, San Francisco and San Jose.

"You just know gaming personality YouTubers are going to swarm this place for vlogs when it opens. At least I hope so! I want to hear their reviews! – **LUCAS**

Oh.
I never made it to see the old Nintendo HQ myself.



Great!
Well, when I get there someday, I can sleep there!

FORECAST

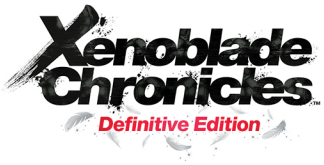
A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

ONCE THE CALENDAR flips into the month of March, the overall release schedule for 2020 will start to kick into gear pretty quickly beginning with the launch of Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX on the 6th. This remake of the first pair of PMD games was just revealed in January, and we've got a preview ready for you on Page 50. Then look forward to our full review in our next issue!

YOU'LL HAVE A solid two weeks to save the imperiled Pokémon of the Mystery Dungeon world before Nintendo will shift your attention to the sea – and the lovely tropical island floating out there, holding your new home! Animal Crossing: New Horizons is finally almost here, and March 20 will be its debut day. See our final preview on Page 43!

AS OF THIS writing, Nintendo's got no first-party plans for the month of April. (Understandable, since Animal Crossing's a big enough release to hold steady for a long while after its arrival.) Other companies will step up to fill the vacancy in the schedule, though – primarily Square Enix, presenting a great-looking new 3D remake of "Seiken Densetsu 3" on April 24. We've got a new preview of it on Page 48 this time around.

APRIL IS ALSO, apparently, the month in which The Wonderful 101 will finally return to us! Vocal diehard fans of this underappreciated and under-sold Wii U release have been clamoring for a port to the Switch for years, and Platinum is finally making it happen via Kickstarter. (Though it's already done, I guess?) A brief reintroduction awaits on Page 47.



JANUARY AND FEBRUARY this year have been marked by Nintendo fans desperately crying out for a new Nintendo Direct presentation, hoping for clarity about what releases lie ahead past the Animal Crossing launch in March. So far, it hasn't happened! (Not as we're sending this issue to print, anyhow!) The biggest name we know that's coming after AC is the remake of Xenoblade Chronicles, but it's still just "2020" at this point.

FINALLY, BECAUSE I can, and because the logo is just so nice and the name is so perfect, the final position this time is going to SkateBIRD. We've got a preview of this one waiting for you in Download, and it just looks so charming, chipper and chirpy! Like Xenoblade, though, it's still nebulously set for just "2020" right now. Hopefully sooner than later!

> Nintendo's marketers are holding a lot of cards close to their chests right now, as they're making fans sweat by not being more forthcoming about what's in the works for later this year. Projects like Breath of the Wild 2 and Metroid Prime 4 are making some kind of progress in development, but we don't know when to expect either of them to be released. Or really when to expect to even see more about them! We're in limbo for the moment. – **LUCAS**

A DLC DELUGE! There's way too much expansion content just launched and just over the horizon to encapsulate it all in this small column, so we'll have to sort it out in the Download section! Flip the page and we'll get started making sense of it all!

A Deluge of DLC!

Expansions abound for the Big N's biggest games!

MY, HOW FAR we've come!

Way back in NF Issue #9, almost six years ago now, this same opening position in the Download section held an article I wrote called "DLC: Nintendo's Golden Opportunity." The Big N had just done something that was totally unexpected and out of character for them, compared to their anti-DLC attitude that they'd held for years on end: They'd announced a Season Pass! Mario Golf: World Tour on the 3DS was given the honor of breaking new ground in downloadable content for the company so commonly marked by a reluctance to change, and I took that opportunity to argue in favor of further expansion into DLC expansions for other games.

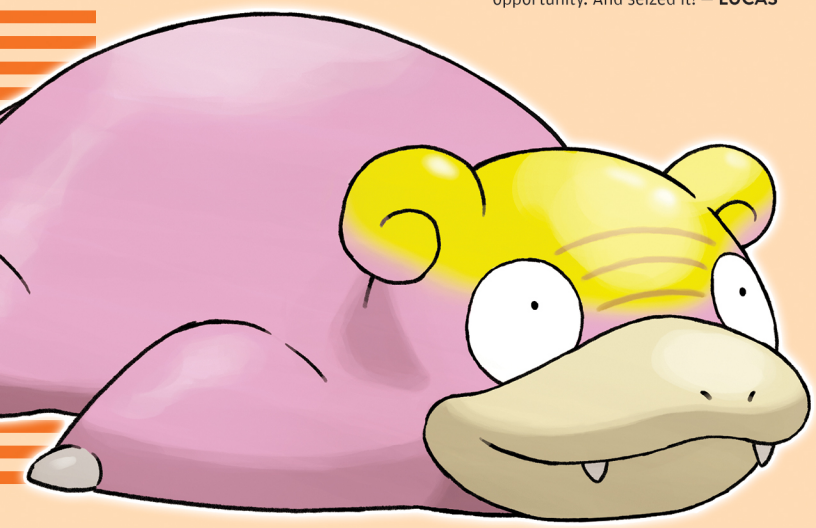
It seems wild, right? So much has changed now that it seems kind of insane that I once felt I needed to pen an opinion piece to help force the issue and get Nintendo to simply consider the possibility of adding DLC to game like Super Smash Bros. or Mario Kart. But that's just how against the practice the company used to be — Nintendo sent their games out to stores, what was on the disc or in the cartridge is all that would ever be there, and that was that. That's how they'd operated for decades, and they didn't want to change a thing.

Now, reportedly, the attitude of Nintendo's decision makers at the highest levels has done a total 180. Apparently DLC has become something of a mandate, and the proof is staring right at us — just about every recent major first-party release on the Switch has had optional extras made available to extend the experience for a few dollars more.

And why not? Nintendo's titles have always enjoyed crazy long shelf lives compared to games published by other companies. If new players are going to keep on buying evergreen titles like Kart and Smash for months and years beyond their original launch dates, why not keep development going on them a little longer and add new characters and stages and costumes and whatever else?

I was in favor of the practice six years ago, and I remain a fan to this day. Especially in the long "drought" periods in-between major retail releases, DLC additions to existing games can help bridge the gap and keep Nintendo's momentum rolling. The Pokémon Company's getting a much-needed break from sending a new retail release out the door this year, the Smash hype cycle gets to gloriously continue well beyond its debut . . . it's nothing but good in my eyes.

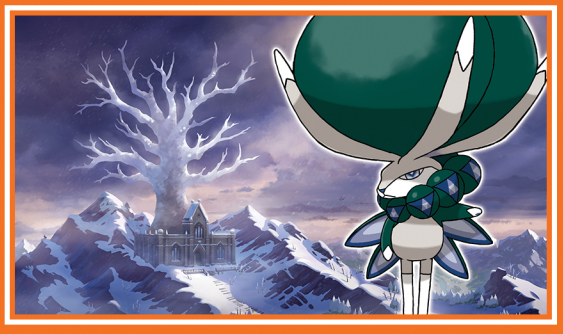
What I'm trying to say is Nintendo clearly did recognize their golden opportunity. And seized it! **— LUCAS**



POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD: THE ISLE OF ARMOR

The Pokémon Company is making a major change! For decades, their most common practice has been to follow up each new generation of mainline Pokémon games with a "third version" that's slightly remixed and released on a new cartridge. There's been some deviation from that norm, but never to this degree! It looks like 2020 will have no new main Pokémon game at all, as instead Sword & Shield will receive a truly substantial DLC expansion, released in two parts.

Part 1 arrives in June, and it's called The Isle of Armor. It lets Galar Trainers travel to a new island off the coast of the mainland, and there they'll discover the new Legendary Pokémon Kubfu, a Fighting-type bear cub. It will evolve into one of two forms of Urshifu (seen above): one that is Fighting/Water and another that is Fighting/Dark. But that's just the start! New Gigantamax forms will be available for the Galar starters, as well as Blastoise and Venusaur. There will be new NPCs to meet, like dojo master Mustard, Poison specialist Klara and Psychic pro Avery. There will be a whole new open area, freely explorable in the same way the Wild Area was, and you'll be able to ride around it all on a Rotom Bike that's customizable in more ways than ever before!



POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD: THE CROWN TUNDRA

But The Isle of Armor is just the beginning! Taking up the usual position reserved for each holiday season's major new Pokémon retail release, Part 2 of the Sword & Shield Expansion Pass, The Crown Tundra, is set to debut in November. It will also add an all-new area to explore that is just off the beaten path from the lands Trainers have already seen in the Galar region.

The Crown Tundra is home to another new Legendary Pokémon, the mysterious rabbit-like Calyrex, a Psychic/Grass-type. (That big bulb up on top of its head apparently is holding its massive brain. Yowza.) Several other Legendaries seem to make their homes in the Crown Tundra area as well, including new Galarian variants of Moltres, Zapdos and Articuno, all the old Regis (Regice, Registeel, Regirock and Regigigas), and two brand-new Regis! We don't know their names for sure yet, but they're clearly Electric and Dragon types, so one must be Regilectric and the other Regidragon. The family's getting bigger!

Both parts of the Sword & Shield DLC are sold together for $29.99, and to promote them, a Galarian Slowpoke has been added to the main game already! It will be able to evolve into a Galarian Slowbro on the Isle of Armor or a Galarian Slowking in the Crown Tundra!

LUIGI'S MANSION 3: MULTIPLAYER PACK

Have you already conquered Hellen Gravely's terrifying tower? Have you scoured that haunted hotel floor by floor, gathering up every ghost and tracking down every treasure? Have you indeed revisited The Last Resort and given every inch of it one last look, just for good measure?

Well, look again. Because there's more in store!

Now, sadly, there is no expansion planned for the single-player campaign of Luigi's Mansion 3. I know, I know! I would have loved for any kind of extension to be applied to the solo quest, as I adored every hour I spent riding up and down that iconic elevator and ghostbusting each floor to completion. But Nintendo must think that the story mode is best left untouched, as the incoming DLC is working to enhance the offerings entirely on the multiplayer side of things.

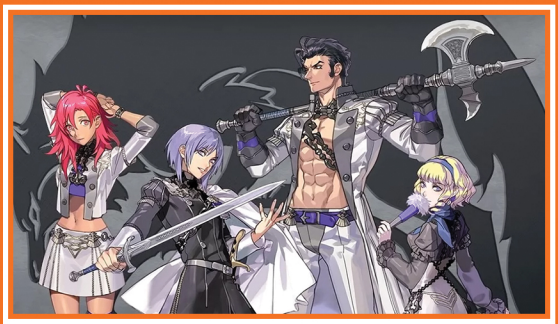
It's probably not a terrible idea, since the multiplayer was the weakest part of the package and it could use some shoring up. The DLC is priced at $9.99 and will be released in two parts. Part 1 is planned to arrive at some point before the end of April, and it will contain three new minigames for the multiplayer ScreamPark mode, six new Themed Ghosts, three new floor themes for ScareScraper mode and three new outfits for Luigi to wear: the disco suit, knight armor and mummy look pictured above. (Hey, I recommended alternate costumes for Luigi in my Second Opinion! Someone was listening.) No word yet on the contents of Part 2 beyond "additional content and features" for both multiplayer modes, but it's planned to arrive before the end of July.

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 3: THE BLACK ORDER: SHADOW OF DOOM

I know it's been on sale since last July, but I'm still honestly kind of shocked by the very existence of Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3 – and even more so because it's a Nintendo exclusive! (What other decade-old dormant series might they revive next? I need to look back into the Wii era for ideas.)

The biggest selling point of the Marvel Ultimate Alliance games is the huge size of their playable rosters. The Black Order didn't disappoint in that regard, as dozens of legendary heroes – and villains – were available in the game from Day 1, including modern movie stars Iron Man, Captain America and Thor. Even some X-Men made the cut, after years of neglect: Wolverine, Storm, Psylocke. They were quickly joined by Cyclops and Colossus as unlockable allies added via free DLC in August.

Following those two freebies has been the paid DLC of the Expansion Pass, which is priced at $19.99 and has been separated into three parts. Part 1, Curse of the Vampire, added The Punisher, Blade, Moon Knight and Morbius to the mix, while Part 2, Rise of the Phoenix, similarly added four more with Phoenix, Gambit, Iceman and Cable. Both of those packs are already available, while the third and final piece of the puzzle, Shadow of Doom, is scheduled for March 26. It adds not four but five new faces: Mr. Fantastic, The Invisible Woman, The Human Torch, The Thing and Dr. Doom himself. That certainly sounds Fantastic to me!



FIRE EMBLEM: THREE HOUSES: CINDERED SHADOWS

OK. Right up front, I'm aware that Fire Emblem: Three Houses DLC has been available for several months now. I'm also aware that we haven't mentioned any of it in NF yet . . . because it's been boring! A total snoozefest so far. But that has just recently changed!

Let's recap. The Fire Emblem: Three Houses Expansion Pass went on sale right alongside the game itself last year, and it was priced at $24.99. It promised four waves of content.

Wave 1 was basically nothing – just an extra, optional outfit for Byleth to wear. Yawn.

Wave 2 was more clothing, but at least there was more of it – extra outfits appeared for most of the students. And Byleth got a pair of glasses? There were new Auxiliary Battles too. Not horrible.

Wave 3 started to get more meaty by adding a quest that would allow you to recruit series favorite Anna at the end of it, as well as adding a sauna onto the grounds of Garreg Mach. Now we're talking!

But Wave 4 is the real meat and potatoes. Just launched in February, "Cindered Shadows" is an all-new story chapter woven into the events of the existing campaign. It introduces a secret fourth house hidden in the depths underneath the monastery: the Ashen Wolves. Four new students make up the Wolves, including beefy grappler Balthus, the dismissive noble Constance, the runaway refugee Hapi and the house leader, Yuri. All can be recruited and brought back to the main tale! We're putting this pack through its paces and will bring you a full review next time!

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: FIGHTERS PASS, VOLUME 2

Finally, the main event! There's just no denying that new additions to the Smash cast are the hypest DLC announcements in the entire video game industry, and Nintendo has wisely realized that fact and decided to keep the ball rolling beyond the end of the first Fighters Pass. Yes friends, a second Fighters Pass is imminent!

It's actually available to buy already, though none of its content has been revealed yet. Just like the first time around, if you're confident in advance that Sakurai will bring the heat, you're welcome to plunk down your $29.99 right away. You'll get a bonus Mii Fighter costume if you do so, based on the Ancient Soldier Gear from Breath of the Wild.

The price is five bucks higher for Pass #2 versus what it was for Pass #1, and that's because there's more content planned for this one! Six new fighters will join the cast in this cycle – one extra compared to the five who comprised Pass #1. Each one will continue to arrive with a new stage and fresh music as well.

All six fighters are planned to be added before December 2021, so we're looking at roughly three new arrivals this year and three more next year, if they space them out evenly. Mr. Sakurai has also confirmed that there will be no third Pass – these six will be the finale for Ultimate. After them we'll just have to wait for the next Smash sequel!

As for who these six will be . . . who can say? I've got no clue, and that's what I love most – just the not-knowing and the speculation of it all. But, if we're lucky, Waluigi will snag one of those six slots . . .

Tiny Hawk's Pro Skater

Even little chicks can pull off big tricks in SkateBIRD.

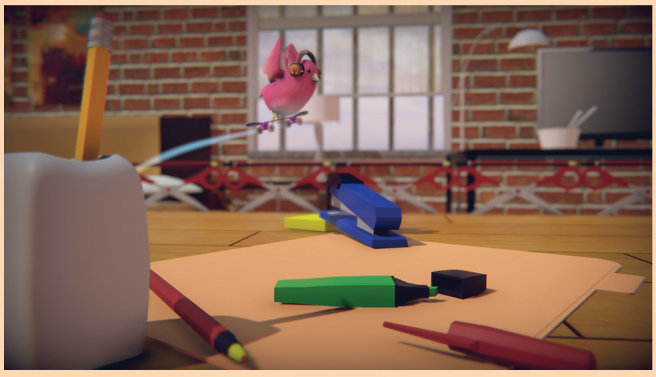
AT ONE TIME – specifically over a decade ago in the '00s – the skateboarding genre soared in gaming. The Tony Hawk and Skate franchises continually rolled out new installments full of kickflips, manuals and 720s. Then it all seemed to crash and burn. Lately there have been fan petitions for EA to revive Skate, as well as Activision throwing out a terrible Tony Hawk 5. But nothing's caught big air.

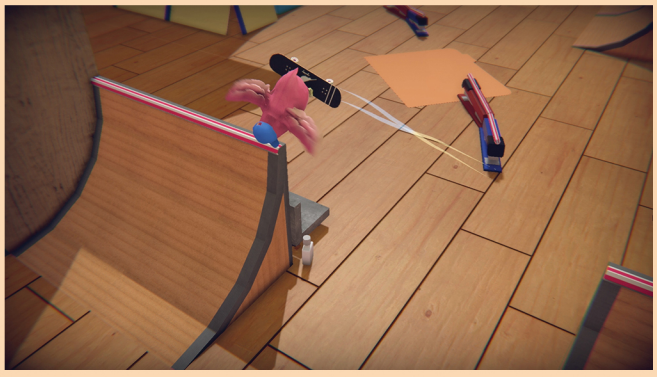
Enter developer Glass Bottom Games and SkateBIRD. Coming soon to Switch, the game takes inspiration from Tony Hawk in many ways except, as the title implies, you're a fowl. It's as cute as it sounds. For instance, the little bird will flap its wings when jumping off a halfpipe to maintain height. Plus the winged animals even wear hats! (Let's keep our fingers crossed that Nintendo offers to let the indie team utilize Mario, Luigi and Wario's famous headpieces.)

The setup for SkateBIRD is that your owner, whom Glass Bottom refers to as "Big Friend," seems to have hit a downward spiral. So it's up to you as a bird to skate your mini heart out. This will lead to other bird buds flying over to meet you, introducing you to new parks and then righting what's wrong with your much larger companion.

These skate parks, by the way, all match the scale of an actual tiny bird. Think something like Toy Story, where small everyday objects can become massive obstacles – you'll grind on No. 2 pencils and find magazines curved to create halfpipes. *(Editor's Note: Feel free to train your own pet bird to skate across your NF issues.)* Hopefully this artistic choice leads to not only unique skate parks, but some visually vibrant ones as well.

SkateBIRD definitely makes a strong first impression. How can you not love little birds doing ollies? Now we wait to see if the final game can match the adorableness already on display in these first screens! **– EVAN**





Digital Dogs & Dates

Pet care meets romance sim in Best Friend Forever.

IF YOU'RE A dog person with a nose for romance and dating, then we've fetched the best game for you. Dating sim Best Friend Forever, from New Zealand-based developers Starcolt, takes caring for a new doggie friend and combines it with meeting new singles (and *their* doggie friends) to create one heartwarming experience that will make your tail wag.

After filling out your dating profile on Woofr (for "people who love dogs who love people who love dogs,") adopting your new dog from the local animal shelter (do you want a small and fluffy Maltese, or a big and sturdy Staffordshire Terrier?) and moving into the beautiful pet-friendly paradise of Rainbow Bay, you and your new four-legged friend find yourselves navigating the complicated world of pet training — as well as the equally complicated world of human relationships. There are six eligible singles (and their pets) that you can meet, such as urban planner Maribel Summers and her fluffy Pomeranian, Gravedigger (who wears a little hardhat!), or librarian Felix Greene and his German Shepherd, Mulder. Not only that, players can romance any of the singles, regardless of gender.

Unlike typical dating sims, Best Friend Forever goes to the dogs — literally — as you'll be balancing your dog's needs and development on a day-to-day basis. Do you want to spend the day just hanging out together, take your dog to doggie day care, or take a walk in the park and hopefully encounter the fellow dog person who's caught your eye? Everything you do together increases or decreases the levels of your dog's stats, like proper manners, fitness and sociability, and the best pups are sure to graduate from Paws Academy with flying colors!

While out and about in Rainbow Bay interacting with everyone, you'll need to keep an eye on your dog to make sure they don't get into trouble, thanks to a series of pop-up windows that will tell you what they're up to. Best of all, there's a sandbox mode where you can play with your dog to your heart's content! Can you beat yesterday's dog petting record?

Originally set to release in the eShop this past Valentine's Day (which was such an appropriate date!) Starcolt decided to delay Best Friend Forever to May 14 in order to give the title a few more weeks of training. **— REBECCA**

Boomeranging Back Around

Travel back to 2002 with Ty the Tasmanian Tiger HD.

I'VE ALWAYS FELT bad for Ty the Tasmanian Tiger. His debut game arrived on the GameCube in 2002, at which point the platform mascot bubble was already beginning to burst. While the game sold fairly well, it didn't become a cultural touchstone of the same importance as earlier titles like Banjo-Kazooie.

That's a shame, as Ty's first outing is an incredibly solid game. It plays as the natural evolution of an N64-era 3D platformer, with large levels filled with interesting details and plenty of collectables. The game could almost be described as a third-person shooter, as Ty's main weapon, his boomerangs, overcame the problem that Super Mario 64 had with combat accuracy.

Ty is a thoroughly Australian game from start to finish, and much of its characters and level design are pulled from the Outback (circa 2002, before it all started burning down). The standout level involves swimming through the Great Barrier Reef, making this a rare game in which the water level is a genuine highlight.

Indie developer Krome Studios has been pouring a lot of love into Ty in recent years, remastering his PC port by adding in new textures and lighting effects to make the game shine. These changes aren't as drastic as something like Spyro Reignited; they're not a complete ground-up HD remake, but they're enough to make an already very pretty game look even better on modern devices.

Krome has rightly recognized that the Switch is the perfect new home for Ty, and in 2019 they turned to Kickstarter to fund the creation of a brand-new port of the game on Nintendo's hybrid console. Having received more than double their requested funding, they've been hard at work making Ty shine on the Switch, adding special Joy-Con controls and even a Hardcore Mode that gives the player just a single life to play through the entire game.

As mascot platformers continue to enjoy a renaissance on the Switch, Ty might finally enjoy the moment in the limelight that was denied him 20 years ago. While this remaster doesn't have quite the same budget as a Mario Odyssey or even a Yooka-Laylee, this is an excellent opportunity to play an overlooked classic.

Besides, with Nintendo still strangely opposed to re-releasing GameCube games on the Switch, Ty the Tasmanian Tiger HD might be the closest thing we get for the foreseeable future. **— MATTHEW L.**

Crushing Crustaceans

Target weak points for massive damage in Fight Crab!

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE is the best-selling console fighting game of all time, so we know the Switch has a gigantic audience just itching for the next big thing in the genre. The great minds at Nussoft, creators of Neo Aquarium and Ace of Seafood, are betting on that big thing being giant crabs with swords hacking each other up for hours, and they're bringing that wager to fruition this year. Fight Crab is by far the most true-to-life decapod-on-decapod action that gaming has ever seen, featuring photo-realistic crustaceans of many types doing battle with lightsabers, power drills, katanas, revolvers, cars, parts of a Star Wars: Episode 1 Podracer (!) and, of course, their own bare claws. And who the heck let that lobster in the ring? Is that even legal? With no referee in sight (unless you count that random sea lion watching the carnage from center stage), there's literally no one trying to keep these fights fair, and that's exactly how the crabs like it.

In truth, following the rules will probably be the last thing on your mind while feeling the pinch from a hard-shelled gladiator. Much like Octodad, another ambitious sea creature who is comically difficult to control, these scrappy crabbies are hard to get a handle on at first. Each of the two analog sticks is assigned to a claw, making for an experience that feels a little like Wii Sports Boxing but without motion controls. You move your legs with the D-Pad and punch with the bumpers. It's not complicated in theory, but then again, neither is driving a tank. That doesn't necessarily make it easy. You win matches by flipping opponents on their backs. The more damage they've taken, the easier they are to flip, just like launching someone out of the battlefield in Smash.

Each crab on the menu-like select screen (Red Crab, Snow Crab, Dungeness Crab, Hair Crab, Elbow Crab, etc.) has their own strengths and weaknesses, most based around speed and claw length. I don't think too many people will be playing this one for its balanced roster. Fight Crab is about getting very serious about bashing your rival's exoskeleton in, then laughing at the absurdity of your choices in life. Did I mention that these crabs can also climb walls, and go into a Dragon Ball-style Super Saiyan mode when pushed too far?

Coconut Crab for Smash! **— JONATHAN**

Full of Feline Fun

Cat lovers will absolutely adore Mineko's Night Market.

IT'S EVERY CAT lover's dream: endless fields of fresh kitties, ready to harvest and snuggle. Wait, what? It's just one of the fanciful features of Mineko's Night Market, a colorful life sim with deep roots in Japanese folklore — think My Neighbor Totoro meets Stardew Valley. As the tagline says, it's all about "crafting crafts, eating eats, and catting cats," and it's brought to you by husband and wife team Brent and Brandi Kobayashi of Meowza Games and Humble Bundle.

In the shadow of Mount Fugu lies a small fishing town where cats seem to outnumber the people. You play as Mineko, a young resident of the town who is trying to find and prove the existence of Abe, the legendary Sun Cat who is worshiped by the other residents of the island.

While not wandering the woods in search of Abe with her friends or growing another bumper crop of kitties, Mineko has plenty of other stuff to do in preparation for the town's weekly Night Market: She can work various jobs (like the local ramen shop), or go fishing, foraging or mining. She can use the materials she's gathered to make crafts using various tools, like a band saw or sewing machine, where you use the Joy-Cons to guide her hands.

Along with operating Mineko's own market stall, the Night Market has all sorts of different attractions to take part in, from cat racing (with you as the jockey!) to dance parties, sumo suit bouts and even Kabuki performances. And it seems like Mineko is not alone in her pursuit of the legendary Abe — a group of men in black have been skulking around the wilderness, intent on making sure Mineko doesn't poke her nose into where it doesn't belong. It seems that Abe isn't the only mystery lurking around Mount Fugu!

Along with the beautiful scenery and artwork (check out the ocean waves in the video trailers), there's a special musical treat in store: Secret of Mana and Trials of Mana composer Hiroki Kikuta has been announced as a guest composer!

While it was first announced in the 2018 Nindies Direct, and then delayed past its original "Early 2019" release date last April, it is now listed on Nintendo's official website with a 2020 release date. Hopefully, the Night Market will be opening for business just in time for lazy summer nights! **— REBECCA**

REVIEWS

Heavily Armed Animals MONKEY BARRELS

DID YOU KNOW that some of your favorite Nintendo games aren't made by Nintendo? While the Big N oversees every game that bears their name, the actual making of many of their titles comes from outside companies like Good-Feel, the team behind Wario Land: Shake It!, Yoshi and Kirby's yarn-based adventures and some of the more fun StreetPass games on the 3DS.

Now they've gone out on their own with the release of Monkey Barrels — though I wouldn't blame you if on first glance you thought this was another Nintendo collaboration. In fact, it's my guess that this project also started as a pitch for a Splatoon spin-off! Just like that colorful armed combat series, Monkey Barrels is about a feud between humanoid animals in a cute-but-strange post-apocalyptic landscape. But instead of squids, the heroes here are (you guessed it) monkeys — battling it out with firearms that are mostly made from different kinds of soda pop containers. They either battle with each other in online-only PVP mode, or against a crab-themed tech CEO in 1P or 2P campaign mode. The same vibrant spirit, quirky techno-rock fusion soundtrack and general sense of irreverence you get from Splatoon is here too. The big difference is that there's no ink to be spread and no transformations to change into. It's a straightforward top-down shoot-'em-up. There's a dodge roll and a jump maneuver to help mix things up, and if you drink enough soda you can burst into flames and "go bananas" for a bit, but from a gameplay perspective, it's much simpler than anything the Inklings have to offer.

There are pros and cons to that. While my 4-year-old son is not ready to take on all the complex button combinations necessary to survive even the most rudimentary round of PvP Splatoon 2 (if you've ever shot a squid kid standing in a corner, blasting ink at his own feet, that might have been him) he can sometimes hold his own for a while in a Vs. battle in Monkey Barrels. Picking the right guns at the right time takes some strategy (options range from shotguns, Uzis, reflecting lasers and rocket launchers), and sub-weapons (grenades, land mines, etc.) do add some variety to the mix, but for the most part this is a frantic game of running and gunning and that's about it.

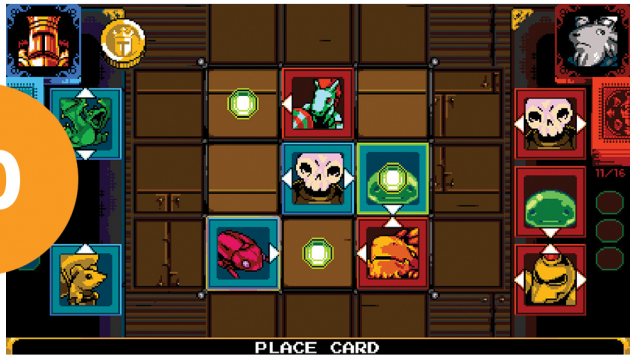
That leads things to get stale sooner than I would have liked. There are nearly 100 weapons to collect, but there isn't much to do with them other than shoot the same enemies (all based on simple electronics like automated trash cans, televisions, microwaves and vacuum cleaners). Each stage takes place in a different splendid locale, ranging from dilapidated dumps to robust jungle vistas, each containing its own unique last boss. And there's also the occasional break into a motorcycle or tank stage (which makes for a nice Ikari Warriors shout-out). They're all a lot of fun, but if you've been playing games for a while, chances are slim that you'll find many surprises here beyond the novel premise.

Monkey Barrels is the definition of a solid-but-safe top-down shooter. If you're OK with a game that sticks to the basics, these are the simians to roll with. **— JONATHAN**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GOOD-FEEL RATING: E

10



A Long-Awaited Coronation

SHOVEL KNIGHT: KING OF CARDS

A PREQUEL TO the other Shovel Knight campaigns, King of Cards takes place before The Enchantress tightened her grip on the land. It's a playful, carefree era of adventurers romping across the countryside just for the sake of it. King Knight, on the other hand, is not so jovial. He lives with his Mom in a rat-infested cabin that doubles as a micro-kingdom, inhabited by loyal vermin that follow his every command. Undeterred by these humble beginnings, his ambition is to be named the King of Cards, the title granted to the master of Joustus, a game played far and wide for fun and profit. Before long, he joins a bard and a rooster-man aboard a splendorous airship, gallivanting to and fro, gathering treasure, friends and Joustus wins along the way.

Whereas past Shovel Knight campaigns had you playing as protagonists filled with hope, longing and loyalty, every aspect of King of Cards is designed to make you feel like a king. For starters, you always have to be strategizing. Not only does King Knight's dash tackle give you the most useful standing melee attack in the series, but it's also the only way to set up his twirling drill kick pogo attack. Likewise, successfully landing a pogo attack sets you up for another dash tackle, and so on. String them all together with the right plan in the right place and you can stay in the air indefinitely.

King of Cards also encourages you to be awful like a king, especially in Joustus. It's a game of luck, skill and power-building. With your starting cards, it isn't too much more complicated than Tic-Tac-Toe, but by the end, you'll have built a deck that is packed with complex abilities. Your enemy's decks are just as strong, leading to some final rounds that might be too tough for you. If so, you can always do what I did and buy cheats that can turn certain losses to total victory! I never knew that winning through such underhanded means could feel so right! That's how thoroughly the game transforms you into its loathsome lead.

But what's a king without followers? King of Cards has more than you can count. By the end, your ship holds nearly every character from the entire Shovel Knight universe and then some. This is where the game's Final Fantasy VI influence really shines. Though King Knight is a cad, his massive flock of friends and family more than compensates for him in the goodness department. In fact, they are such wonderful people that they don't seem to even notice that he's awful, not unlike the loyal supporters of the world's worst politicians. It culminates in a surprise ending that propels the events of Specter Knight, Shovel Knight and Plague Knight's campaigns, and also defines King Knight's character to a "T," delivering a last-minute narrative gut punch that hit me harder than any game I've played in years.

With shorter stages to accommodate the King's limited attention span, King of Cards is the fastest game in the series for speedrunners, but for completionists, it's by far the biggest of them all. You get all-new boss fights plus battles with every member of the Order of No Quarter, tons of Joustus cards to collect, weapons to find, medals to achieve and alternate routes to discover in nearly every stage. There are also secrets that are purely decorative, fitting for a king in love with useless displays of wealth.

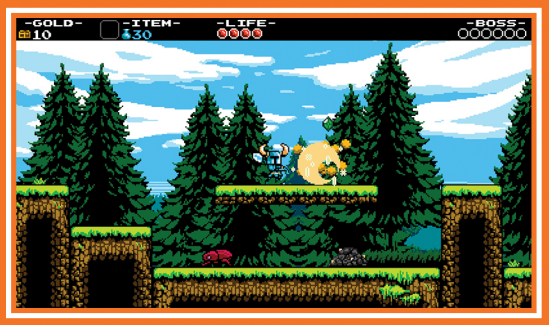
You know a game might be perfect when your only complaint is that it left you wanting more. If it then gives you more, you can be sure it's perfect, and that's exactly what King of Cards does! At first I thought it was too short, but that was before I went back to unlock all the optional boss fights and inventory items, then jumped into the New Game+ mode.

All told, this is the biggest, most well-crafted, funniest and, in some ways, most emotionally potent game from Yacht Club yet. If it were up to me, the Shovel Knight series would go on forever! — **JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: YACHT CLUB GAMES RATING: E

THE PREVIOUS TALES

King of Cards has sent the single-player Shovel Knight series out on a high note — or the first era of the series, at least, as further sequels will follow in the future. For now, though, the Treasure Trove is officially complete. And you shouldn't miss any part of it! Here's a quick reminder of the adventures that debuted in previous years!



SHOVEL OF HOPE

Following the conclusion of a wildly successful Kickstarter campaign in early 2013, the original Shovel Knight game arrived in June 2014. In this debut quest, our horn-helmeted hero treks across a land full of traps and treasure, battling the villainous Order of No Quarter with his signature Shovel Blade and its Zelda II-inspired down thrust attack. The most straightforward and approachable of all four single-player stories, Shovel of Hope is still the best place to start.

PLAGUE OF SHADOWS

Yacht Club Games' Kickstarter campaign offered several stretch goals that were easily surpassed, and the most interesting one was the promise to make a few of the villains into alternate playable characters. Rather than just stick them in the same story, though, the team created all-new tales for each! Plague Knight's came first, in 2015 — but you may want to save it for last, as his potion-tossing gameplay style is the most difficult of all to get a grip on.

SPECTER OF TORMENT

Finally, arriving day-and-date with the Nintendo Switch three years ago on March 3, 2017, Specter of Torment cast the undead Specter Knight as its star . . . or should I say "Donovan" instead? This tale flashes back to the past to reveal the truth of who Specter Knight once was while he was still a living, breathing being. His gameplay mechanics of running up walls and slashing through the air at an angle take a little getting used to, but feel great when mastered.

A Brawl to End it All

SHOVEL KNIGHT SHOWDOWN

IT'S GOING TO be impossible to review this game without mentioning Smash Bros., as that's what the gameplay is trying to mimic, but gamers should know going in that it just isn't built to live up to that measure — nor should it be. Showdown is a party fighter with various modes where players have health points instead of Smash's damage percentage and lives just like the Smash Bros. stock mode. Where it differs is gem collecting — each stage has a requisite number to collect to win, unless it's a straight battle.

When picking one of the characters who already have their own adventure, they play just as they do in their platforming quests, just placed inside a fighting game. This has some success, but an interesting mechanic while platforming can be very limiting or overpowered in fighting. For example, King Knight's jump is purposefully lacking in height, so this makes scaling some stages in Showdown a nightmare. Other characters have a simpler time, like the unlockable Liquid Samurai.

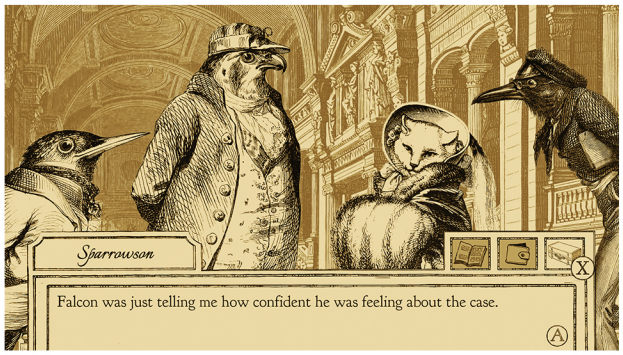
There are other balance issues as well, like pretty much anything involving Polar Knight. His size can be overpowering to opponents or a detriment to his success based on the stage and how much of it he takes up. Unlocking all of the characters and stages can be fun, and if challenges are too steep a code can bypass it all. It's a joy to try out the different styles of all of the characters, and it's especially cool playing as some of the baddies, but in the end that opens up even more balance issues. I respect that Yacht Club remained true to their characters, but not all of them fit inside this sort of gameplay.

When playing with many people, especially in larger stages, the 8-bit style of the game can really become confusing. I often lost smaller characters in the fray, and the battles get downright frenetic with so many potential gimmicks in play. The controls are simple, only having jump, attack, special attack and parry available. This at times feels too limiting and throttles depth in the gameplay. It's very easy to spam certain character moves that are very difficult to dodge even with a good parry, and it's really no fun to be on either side of that coin. When you're invincible after being struck, you can't do much of anything. While it's important that there's a cooldown so spamming isn't worse, it can also be immensely frustrating not being able to collect a gem or strike an opponent after escaping. Most stages are so full of hazards that you'll spend most of your time avoiding them and only getting cheap shots in on your foes.

An included story mode is tailored to each fighter and makes solo play interesting, but I lost more lives during the weird minigames than I did in the battles. The game is definitely worth spending time with, but I'd be hesitant to break it out at a party where people are unfamiliar with the franchise. As the content of the overall Treasure Trove is unmissable, the inclusion of this oddball title neither makes nor breaks the case for owning it. **— BRETT**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: YACHT CLUB GAMES RATING: E



This Court's For the Birds

AVIARY ATTORNEY: DEFINITIVE EDITION

MORE THAN JUST "Phoenix Wright with birds," Aviary Attorney is "Phoenix Wright with birds, anachronistic pop culture references and moral dilemmas in 1840s France." It's also got one of the most unique art styles and soundtracks of anything I've played in the last few years. Defense attorney Jayjay Falcon and his assistant Sparrowson are out to solve mysteries and (possibly) rewrite history, as they find themselves embroiled in the turmoil preceding the real-life events of France's 1848 revolution.

Like Ace Attorney, you'll visit crime scenes to investigate and search for clues, question potential witnesses and defend your clients in court. There are a few obvious homages here and there — Falcon and Sparrowson have the "ladder vs. stepladder" argument at one point — but as soon as the verdict is handed down at the end of the first trial, you'll realize that this is the *real* dark age of the law. Your actions during investigations and in the courtroom — win or lose — shape the narrative, with three potential final chapters that will unfold depending on your actions. You'll also encounter a few historical figures (well, animals based on historical figures), and if you know anything about French history, you'll be pleasantly surprised.

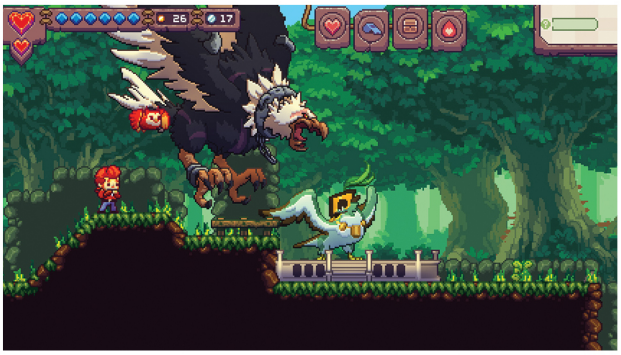
What makes Aviary Attorney stand out are the music and graphics. Developer Sketchy Logic based the characters on French caricaturist J.J. Grandville's works (specifically his art from Scenes of the Public and Private Life of Animals) and gives them personality through simple animations — not just eyes blinking and beaks talking, but actions like blowing cigar smoke in someone's face. What I most looked forward to while playing was what kind of animal I'd be seeing next — there's a giraffe housemaid, a mother/daughter kangaroo pair, King Louis Philippe as an emperor penguin and even a kindly dodo that you'll encounter while exploring the various streets and landmarks of Paris. The soundtrack is filled with music that you'll immediately recognize, even if you're not a classical music buff, with a lot of appropriate works from Camille Saint-Saëns' The Carnival of the Animals. Unlockable extras include achievement medals, a music player, a Jacques-Noir (blackjack) minigame and a gallery of Grandville's original artwork, but that's pretty much it.

The main criticism I have is the game's overall length — you can probably get through the entire game in a few hours, including all of the final chapters. The final chapters themselves feel like a visual novel epilogue — there's a little gameplay in one of the endings, but it's all mostly for show as the ending's pre-determined. The length also works against the character development as well — I would have liked to have more chances to get to know Séverin Cocorico, the rooster prosecutor who is Falcon's main rival, a lot better.

Although it's on the short side, I enjoyed Aviary Attorney's humor and relished the tale's twists and turns. If you've got an interest in historical fiction, if you loved Ace Attorney or if you like whimsical 19th century artwork, then pay a visit to the Aviary Attorney law offices. **— REBECCA**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: VERTICAL REACH DEVELOPERS: SKETCHY LOGIC & VERTICAL REACH RATING: T



A Bird for a Buddy

EAGLE ISLAND

8.0

"ROGUELIKE" DOESN'T HAVE to be a bad word. It's all in how you handle it.

Sometimes, games adopt roguelike sensibilities for the sake of it, and result in nothing more than a figurative act of banging your head against a brick wall for hours on end. In rare cases, those head-smashing exercises can garner a cult following. In other cases — and this is more commonly referred to as a "roguelite" — a game will basically just adopt the basic precepts of the genre without going too overboard. Eagle Island is one of those games.

Here's the premise: Rescue one of your two eagle friends from a giant bird. You're in, right?! It's a concept right out of a Saturday morning cartoon and I am completely here for it. The cartoony aesthetic is breezy to boot, and the animation style jumps right off of the Switch screen, almost like it's based on an existing '90s property.

Now, this task can be as easy or as tough as you'd like. Four difficulty settings are at your disposal right away (on top of a speedrunning mode) which help ease you into the idea of tackling randomized dungeons with set bosses at the end of them. Yep, it's one of those games, but it doesn't lay it on too thick.

There's an actual sense of Metroid-like progression here, with periodic abilities that change how you approach each map on top of all of the temporary ones you can buy between levels. Many of these sport different biomes that add on to that aforementioned progression. That said, the world doesn't feel as cohesive as it should, despite the strikingly cute art.

The action is fairly straightforward, which works mostly to its advantage as it encourages you to go straight from map to map. That other eagle friend sidekick that survived the abduction attempt? He's your main weapon. You'll use your attack button to queue him up for a strike that you can aim in any direction. While aiming you'll do a sort of stylish freeze frame pose, so you can line it up perfectly and use said pose as a kind of air dashing.

Part of the reason this simple system works is because of the accessibility options that are automatically available. There are arrows on the sides of the screen to denote enemies you can't see. There are options for less screen shaking, you can remap all of the controls, alter the visuals and customize the UI. It's above and beyond the call of most games outside of, say, Celeste.

It goes a long way, but it's the kind of game where you might want to take a break after delving into a few dungeon runs. Sometimes it does blend together, and the roguelike sensibilities don't always gel. With how lovely it looks, I would have preferred a more narrative-driven adventure with defined level design.

Sometimes the framework of the game holds it back, but Eagle Island is an adorable little action platformer that pretty much everyone can enjoy. And with its accessibility options, it can be a nice gateway for other, deeper experiences. **— CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SCREENWAVE MEDIA DEVELOPER: PIXELNICKS RATING: E10+

Never Bear False Witness

BEAR WITH ME: THE LOST ROBOTS

ADVENTURE GAMES ARE surprisingly difficult to get right, and while Bear With Me: The Lost Robots tries its best, two very big bugbears spoil the experience.

It's clear that a lot of love went into this game. A black-and-white noir murder mystery, The Lost Robots looks like a '50s crime movie set in a children's toy box. Washed up private eye Ted E. Bear and his human assistant Flint are on the case, solving a grizzly robot murder that reveals a larger conspiracy.

The game is Sam & Max meets Who Framed Roger Rabbit, and to a certain extent, that works. A lot of the characters you meet throughout the story are engaging and entertaining, and while the puzzles are nothing to write home about, they are at least no worse than standard adventure game fare.

There are some hiccups involved in porting this point-and-click PC game to Switch. You'll want to play in Handheld Mode to make use of the touchscreen, and you may encounter the occasional glitch. At one point I thought I'd soft-locked the game because I couldn't move at all, but it turned out the game still thought I was standing on a bucket on the other side of the map.

The Lost Robots is the fourth chapter in the episodic Bear With Me series, and despite being a prequel, the game assumes that the player is already familiar with several characters, including a few who don't even show up in this story. These quibbles can easily be forgiven, but other flaws are harder to overlook.

The problem lies with the two leads. Bear and Flint are meant to be gruff, tough detectives, but they just come across as cynical and bored. When your point of view characters are constantly complaining, it's hard to see the joy and fun in the rest of the story. This extends to all aspects of the protagonists' presentation. Flint looks glassy-eyed and unexpressive, while the voice acting for the pair sounds monotone and flat. This feels like an attempt to present them as classic noir antiheroes, but they lack charisma. Comedy duos don't work when both partners are playing straight-men.

Thanks to Bear and Flint, the game also has a tone problem. It's probably supposed to be funny to watch a teddy bear spray out a slew of PG-13 expletives, but the delivery is such that it's just unpleasant. There's also a really dark revelation in the third act that undermines the light, fluffy jokes that came before. In spite of this, there are definitely some great moments in here. The classic noir finale is a highlight, even if Bear repeatedly complains that it's too cliché. At the very least, this game deserves credit for ending on a high note.

Bear With Me: The Lost Robots is a game that is laser-targeted at existing fans of adventure games. If you're a fan of LucasArts, Double Fine or Telltale, you'll probably get something out of this.

Alternatively, if you're not already an adventure game aficionado, there are a lot of far better places to start.

— MATTHEW L.

5.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MODUS GAMES
DEVELOPER: EXORDIUM GAMES RATING: T

Game Boy Accurate!

SQUIDLIT

7.0

WITH NINTENDO STILL so unwilling to give us a decent Virtual Console library on the Switch, indie developers are doing the best they can to fill in. Squidlit is the latest in a long line of nostalgia-bait titles to arrive on the system, providing a pixel-perfect imitation of a Game Boy platformer from the early '90s. And for only $1.99!

Squidlit is not a complicated game. In the spirit of titles like Kid Dracula or even Super Mario Land, your job is simply to jump around, defeat enemies and have a good time. There's a vague plot that serves as justification for your quest, but it's made very clear early on that you're not supposed to take any of this too seriously.

You play as a tiny baby squid, and your primary means of movement is also your only weapon. Performing a double jump causes the squidlit to squirt out a drop of ink, which can be used to incapacitate enemies, or give you a slight boost in height to reach higher platforms.

To the untrained eye, Squidlit could almost pass for a forgotten gem from the Game Boy heyday. Creator Alex Barrett has tried her hardest to stick to the limitations of Nintendo's famous handheld, right down to composing all the music on an actual Game Boy.

If there's a downside to this, it's that Squidlit doesn't do anything that other games haven't done better before. There are no big surprises here in terms of gameplay, no quirky gimmicks to revolutionize the classic formula. Even a relative platforming novice will likely breeze through the entire game in less than an hour.

If one thing does stand out, it's the writing. Squidlit is a genuinely funny title, which is not easy to achieve on a Game Boy. Some very silly dialogue really helps to sell the game's lighthearted tone.

Of course, such an easygoing game is unlikely to provide much of a challenge. You won't feel threatened at any point, as the world of Squidlit is littered with so many health pickups that most of them are entirely redundant. The hardest part of the entire experience is figuring out how to defeat a couple of the bosses, but even that is hardly rocket science. That said, the lack of challenge isn't necessarily a bad thing. There's something to be said for a game that allows the player to simply unwind.

It's worth noting that the health items in Squidlit are muffins, as they serve as the perfect metaphor for this game as a whole. Like a muffin, Squidlit is light and fluffy. It won't take you long to finish it, and you'll barely remember it once it's gone, but in the instant that you're enjoying it, you'll have a good time.

The next time it's a rainy afternoon and you're feeling stressed, you could do a lot worse than sinking a couple of dollars into the eShop and spending half an hour as a little green squid. **— MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUIDLIT INK
RATING: E

A Pair of Paramedics
THE STRETCHERS

THE SWITCH IS a complete and utter success when it comes to fostering creativity. We saw it very early on with the Wii, before the idea of "shovelware" took over and the market became crowded with the perception that WiiWare was quantity over quality. We saw flashes of brilliance with the Wii U, before most of the market completely gave up on it. Things are resplendent again with the runaway sales of the Switch, and The Stretchers, although not without its flaws, is just one example of that newfound creativity.

This time that new spark of originality is from Tarsier Studios, who handled the similarly unique Little Nightmares (which arrived on Switch in 2018). The concept of The Stretchers is a little out there, thanks to a goofy physics system and a setup not unlike that of Crazy Taxi. Your job, if you choose to accept it, is to control not one but two paramedic professionals simultaneously (either by yourself or with a friend) to rescue people hit by a mysterious "Dizzy" sickness.

To help rectify this plague, you'll squat down, grab patients in your trusty stretcher, then drive them back en masse in your ride to acquaint them with the cure. That's pretty much it! Each level will throw something new your way and challenge the physics system, but for the most part you're collecting warm bodies and depositing them.

Here's where a lot of people will differ in terms of ideology. The Stretchers is clearly meant to be a fun little distraction that earns its charm in part due to the wonky physics. For some people that might border on frustration, depending on how finicky the controls are in any given moment. I can make the best of pretty much any bad situation, so I don't mind making adjustments, but just know: It's not perfect. This is especially the case in solo play, as both avatars can have a tough time navigating each map, especially if one gets a little stuck.

While the actual missions are mostly hits, I do wish The Stretchers went a little further with its premise. You kind of jump into the world, you're acquainted with it very quickly (so far so good) and then get in and get out in a few hours without any time to truly marinate on it. Nearly every facet of the world, from the main characters to the antagonist, feels half-baked and fleeting.

Even the somewhat apt Crazy Taxi comparison feels very loose, as driving the ambulance is actually a very methodical and calculated activity until you can score upgrades for it (and even then, driving around in the very tiny map can be a hollow exercise). If you don't care about collectables, there's even less to do outside of the main set of missions. Think of this as a family experience instead of a meaty adventure.

The Stretchers is the epitome of simple fun, with all of the strings that come along with that promise. It's playable solo, but you're definitely going to want to bring a friend to squeeze as much as you can out of this small world. **— CHRIS**

6.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: TARSIER STUDIOS
RATING: E

Save Your Cat!
SUPER CRUSH KO

8.0

BAYONETTA WASN'T WELL-KNOWN to Nintendo fans until her second game was announced as a Wii U exclusive. That budding fame turned to fortune when she became a top-tier fighter in Super Smash Bros., being loved (and feared) by millions of Smashers around the world.

That said, she's not for everybody, especially kids. That can be frustrating, as her high-flying, acrobatic adventures could potentially be fun for all ages. That's where Super Crush KO comes in. It's a flat, classy, streamlined Bayonetta game in everything but name. Using a mix of standard punches and kicks, expert aim with a firearm and super-powered mid-air strikes, Karen (the star of the game) reminded me of Platinum's now-famous anti-hero almost immediately. If you ever wanted to get into the Bayonetta series but were put off by the complex controls or, uh, "other complexities" that series has to offer, then this game is for you.

The story is adorable but literally paper-thin. Karen's cat Chubbz is kidnapped by a sassy alien and her army, and it's up to Karen to get her back. For the player, that means running through city streets, beating down extraterrestrial animals (most based on wolves, bats, armadillos and other Earth animals) until you reach the giant world boss, then heading off to the next area. Hitting dodge allows you to take just about any kind of hit without damage, but since the game is constantly rewarding you for going on the offensive, it can be easy to lose sight of that. After you pummel an enemy, a counter immediately starts ticking down. Take out another creature before time runs out, and your combo goes up a letter grade. Fail, and you have to start your violent homework all over again. You're always being encouraged to rush and attack, making every enemy encounter both a battle to the death and a race against time.

That's pretty standard for this type of fast-paced character action game. What makes Super Crush KO special is how it does so much with so little. The art uses a technique called "symbol animation" where characters aren't redrawn frame-by-frame like in Cuphead or Mega Man Zero, and are instead made up of simple shapes that are moved individually. It's much cheaper to produce than traditional hand-drawn art, yet Super Crush KO looks top-notch, with intensely expressive character movements that really pack a wallop. The soundtrack is also an example of less being more, featuring simple tunes that add real feeling without being intrusive.

The only bad news is, that's really all there is to it. After you learn all your moves in the first world, things get pretty same-y. The game continues to introduce new enemies and traps until the end, but they are all basic variations on the same themes.

If you love playing and replaying 2D beat-'em-ups for high scores, you'll get your 15 bucks' worth here and more. If not, you may want to wait for a sale. **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: VERTEX POP
RATING: E10+

Robot vs. Riddles
THE TALOS PRINCIPLE: DELUXE EDITION

IT DOESN'T MATTER how old a game is — any developer can breathe new life into it by releasing it on the Switch. Originally released in 2014, The Talos Principle plays like a combination of Portal and Myst. You play as a robot traversing a digitally created world (or is it?) in first-person view. At its heart it's a puzzle game in which you enter puzzle rooms and attempt to solve the puzzle to collect a tetromino "sigil." These are used to unlock other areas and items to further explore the bigger mysteries: where are you, what are you, who built it and what is it all about?

The puzzles deal with rather lethal elements like sentry turrets and giant guns, but the consequences are nil — you just "rewind" and respawn if you fail. The idea in much of the first area is jamming these obstacles with jammers set on tripods. Then you unlock things like reflectors and boxes that generally make the puzzles more complicated. Each new element receives several puzzles to gradually ramp up the befuddlement so you're not dropped into something without understanding its principles.

Load times are a bit long between worlds, but the engine generally runs like a dream on Switch. It still looks like it was built in the era in which it was first released, so it has some dated style, but it's excusable and doesn't damage your suspension of disbelief because you'll see "glitches" appear on purpose to propose clues to the overall mysteries.

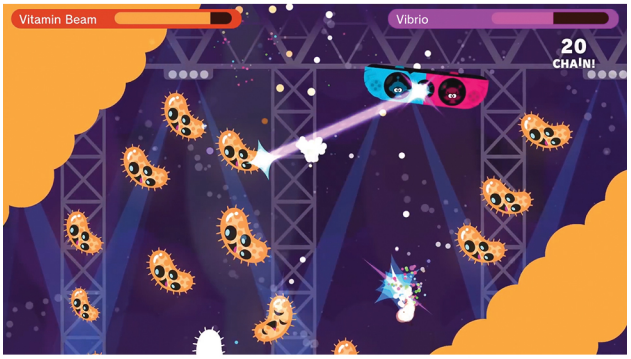
There are weird terminals you interact with that allow you to see philosophy notes, readings, email conversations, chats and other possibly innocuous or perhaps intensely revealing texts that are impossible to decipher early on. These are generally skippable if you want to get back to the puzzles, as the game logs what you've seen and that full record is accessible at any time. Each new locale builds on this, and you'll visit Greek buildings, pyramids, medieval castles and more, besting the puzzles of a designer who talks to you in a god-like voice. All of these elements point to an ominous story arc that unfolds slowly, but it's a bit of a slog to get through it all. New areas and puzzle elements can only do so much when it seems like you have too much information and still know nothing.

There are plenty of secrets, but there are Easter eggs and star sigils that can also be found for intrepid puzzlers. The DLC that released in 2015 — The Road to Gehenna — is also included, and it's much more difficult than the main game. You can access it right off the bat, but you'll need the main game as a primer for most of its conundrums.

The experience is definitely different than most and is worth exploration. I could tell just from playing that a lot of passion went into this from the developers, and they definitely don't want to give the mystery away too early. That said, $30 is a bit much to ask for a game this old. **— BRETT**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: CROTEAM RATING: E10+



Internal Medicine

VITAMIN CONNECTION

ANIMALS ARE IN our spotlight for this issue, as the impending arrival of the new Animal Crossing sequel has us all thinking about all the kinds of creatures that roam our Earth, swim in its seas and soar through the sky. But wait! There are more lifeforms to consider — there's a whole other world of microscopic organisms living *their* lives inside the bodies of all those other animals that walk, swim and fly around. And it's this inner world that Vitamin Connection explores.

Developed by WayForward and published by Limited Run Games, Vitamin Connection has been built primarily with two-player co-op in mind. One player, wielding one Joy-Con, takes command of Vita-Boy and the blue half of a miniature vessel called the Capsule Ship. Meanwhile the pink side of that same craft is piloted by a second player, holding a second Joy-Con, taking charge of the actions of Mina-Girl. Together the team of two takes their medicine-shaped ship into the bodies of ill individuals to apply a direct approach to battling bad bacteria: blasting them out of existence with the healing laser, the Vitamin Beam!

If you read our preview a couple of issues ago, you're already aware of the twist that comes next, but here's an explanation for everyone else: This co-op is asynchronous. That means that Player 1 has a different job than Player 2, and both have to work together in unison in order to succeed in their medical missions.

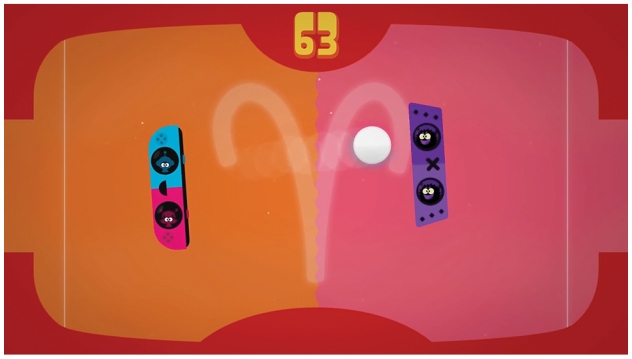
Player 1, Vita-Boy, controls the up, down, left and right movement of the Capsule Ship with the analog stick of the first Joy-Con. He also has the trigger function of the Vitamin Beam mapped to the ZL Button on that Joy-Con too. It's the easier of the two jobs — just keep the ship from crashing into walls or foes and tap the zap whenever anything needs to get blasted.

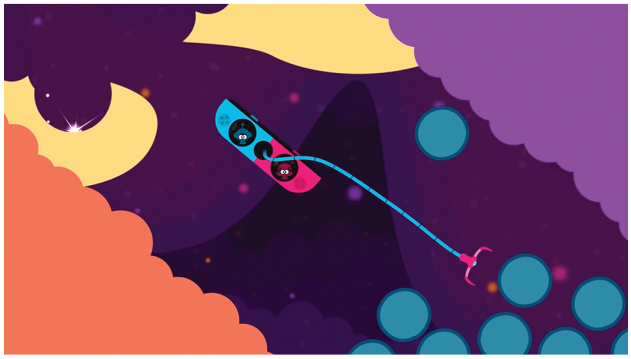
Player 2 has a more difficult role, as Mina-Girl is in charge of the 360-degree rotation of the vessel — mapped to the physical rotation of the second Joy-Con — as well as simultaneously using that Con's stick to direct the trajectory of the Beam when it's fired by Player 1.

Two issues ago I commented on the oddity of this division of labor: It would seem to make more sense to have one player be in charge of both aspects of movement (position and rotation) while the partner took charge of both aspects of attacking (firing the laser and directing its vector). I get why WayForward kept things separate the way they did, as it demands a more coordinated cooperation from both players this way.

Unfortunately, it may demand too much. I was looking forward to joining forces with my 8-year-old Carter to take on this challenge, but it proved to be too challenging for him. Even given the easier job of Player 1, he got frustrated quickly and wanted to give up. Our co-op experience ended before it began.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: LIMITED RUN GAMES
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD RATING: E





Luckily, though the game is meant for two players, it is playable solo. So I swapped out the Joy-Cons for my trusty Pro Controller and soldiered on alone, taking command of both halves of the ship myself.

As a solo experience, Vitamin Connection is more traditional and less confusing. You have a lot of ship functions to manage all by yourself, but since you are by yourself, there's no miscommunication happening between you and a Player 2. Guiding the flight of the ship, its rotation, the targeting angle of the laser and the timing of firing it all mesh together well to make for an enjoyable voyage through the innards of the illness-ridden Sable family.

The gameplay is similar in many ways to Nintendo's Kuru Kuru Kururin, in that you're guiding an oblong ship through tight corridors that twist, turn and double back on themselves. Touching a wall means taking damage, so you need to sail through cleanly by rotating the angle of the ship and squeezing between skinny stretches.

In wider areas where the walls aren't closing in, waves of enemies often appear to oppose you. You have to judiciously apply the power of the Beam, as its energy drains the longer you use it, and if it runs out it gets powered down to a piddly little laser pointer with very little impact to its attack.

Most levels are non-linear, letting you choose multiple paths to take in cruising through the insides of each patient. You get a map screen to help guide you toward the vital locations that are your ultimate objectives, but it's often misleading – you might need to go "north," but the right path to take is actually "south." That's odd.

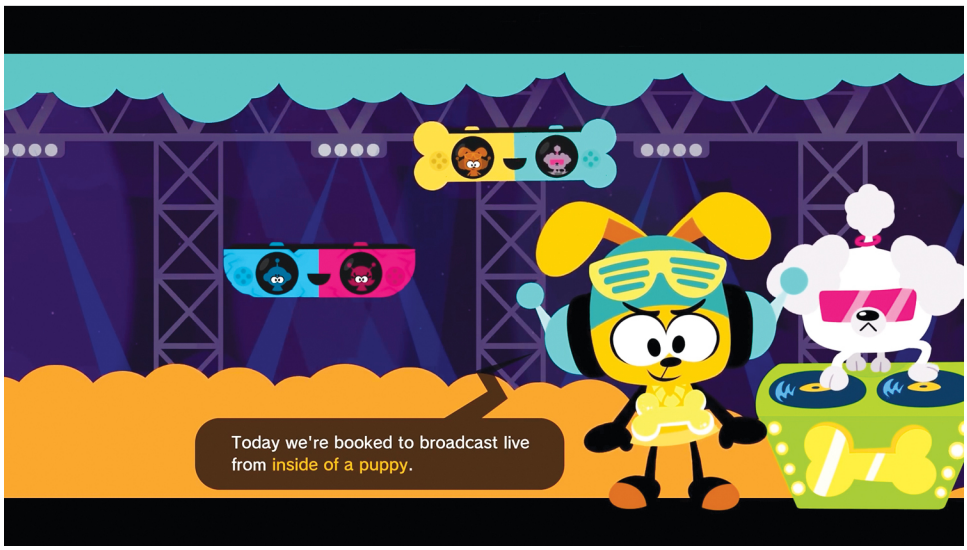
Once you do reach one of the goal points, you'll be challenged to a minigame that serves as a boss battle of sorts – clear it, and the vital location will be all healed up. In addition to the three we discussed two issues ago, there are also Pong-like challenges called "Medicine Ball" as well as "Escaper" sequences that are even more directly reminiscent of Kuru Kuru Kururin, but force you into ships of even odder shapes and send you constantly spinning clockwise or counterclockwise. I liked each of these challenges, but "Dance Festival" (previously known as "Synchronized Swimming") proved frustrating. It's built like a Rhythm Heaven minigame that asks you to tap buttons to a beat, but the control retains the same sensitivity from the main game – so you can't tap to the beat, but rather have to apply just a slight pressure, then ease off. Bah.

I took a break for a while after getting put off by the controls in moments like those (the grabber arm you get for the Capsule Ship is also a chore to handle), but I kept coming back to Vitamin Connection and ultimately had a lot of fun once I got used to its quirks. Bringing me back again and again was the presentation, which is spectacular. Each level opens and closes with mini cartoons – beautifully animated and voiced – and there's great voice acting from colorful NPCs you come across during each level as well. The music is also sensational, fading from one song to the next like listening to a funky radio station as you cruise along in each stage. In these areas, you could tell WayForward's team was having a blast putting this game together. It just oozes fun.

I'm disappointed that co-op with Carter fizzled so fast, and I think an options menu that offered the choice to reassign jobs for each player could have helped there – if he just was on laser duty, perhaps, he could have handled things better and had more fun. He ultimately enjoyed sitting back and watching me play. We'll give co-op another shot when he's a little older.

If you've got a skilled co-op ally at the ready already, though, I recommend diving in immediately! There are illnesses to cure, and Vita-Boy and Mina-Girl need help! **– LUCAS**

8.5



7.5

Putting the Teachers to the Test

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 5

AFTER FOUR INCREDIBLE new roster additions — Joker, Hero, Banjo & Kazooie and Terry Bogard — each of whom also introduced all-new franchises to the ever-expanding crossover mix of the Super Smash Bros. series, the hype leading up to the reveal of the fifth and final fighter of Ultimate's Fighters Pass was off the charts. Who could it possibly be? Who would be big enough to tie a bow on such a wild package?

For his part, Mr. Sakurai didn't help temper expectations at all, as the January video presentation that finally revealed the Fighters Pass finale opened with him being cagey and cryptic, almost leaning toward the camera with hushed tones, claiming that the character he was about to reveal was *so* secret that not even other Nintendo employees were privy to the surprise! You could almost hear the collective gasp go out from Smash fans around the world. Surely with an introduction like that we were about to get another Cloud-tier reveal, right? Someone massively unlikely or unexpected? Hype hit a fever pitch!

. . . And then dropped like a two-ton rock. Sakurai gleefully revealed that the fifth and final Fighters Pass roster addition would be . . . another blue-haired sword wielder from the Fire Emblem series.

I'll give him credit. I, for one, did not see that coming.

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

Byleth from Fire Emblem: Three Houses has joined the cast of Smash — a selection so boring and so safe and so predictable that it actually turned out to be unpredictable. Fans reacted poorly, which was not surprising, since the most frequently repeated complaint about the Smash roster is that there are too many sword users, followed quickly by the secondary gripe that there are too many Fire Emblem representatives. By checking both of those boxes again, it feels like Nintendo's twisting the knife — or else they're really out of touch with what fans want out of Smash DLC, which seems impossible at this point.

Oh well. We got Byleth. We have to deal with it now.

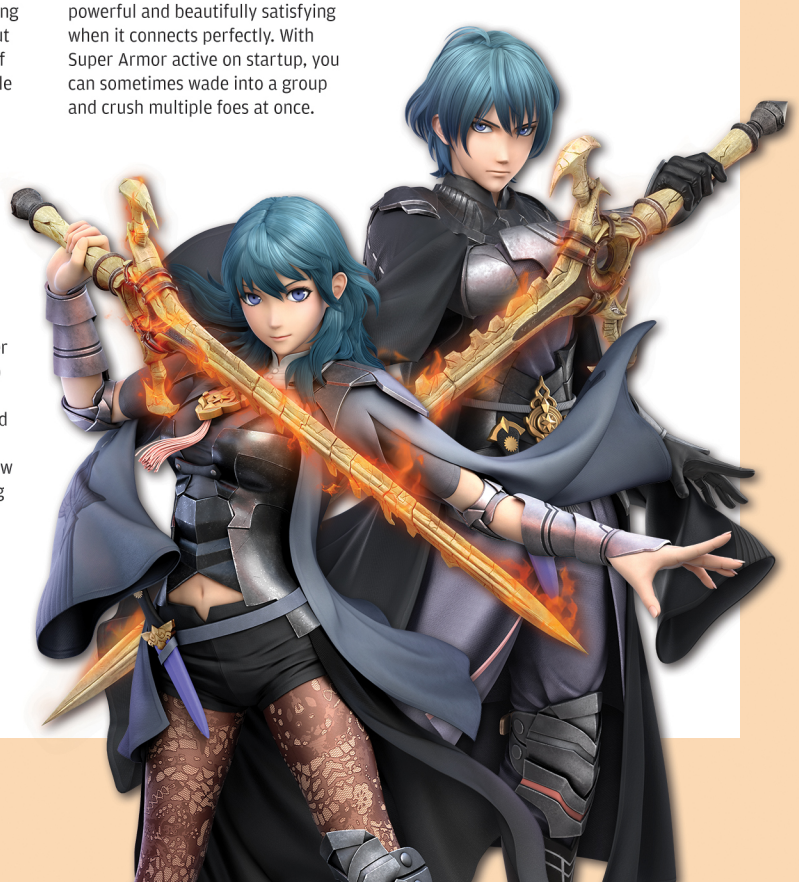
To the character's credit, "Fire Emblem sword user" is not a full description of what we've been offered here. The overuse of swords in the series was even acknowledged in the reveal trailer, and Byleth sets the sword aside by wielding three other types of weapons as well. Trying to collectively represent the three house leaders Edelgard, Claude and Dimitri in this same character as well, Byleth can pull out an axe, bow and spear, respectively, when using attacks in different directions.

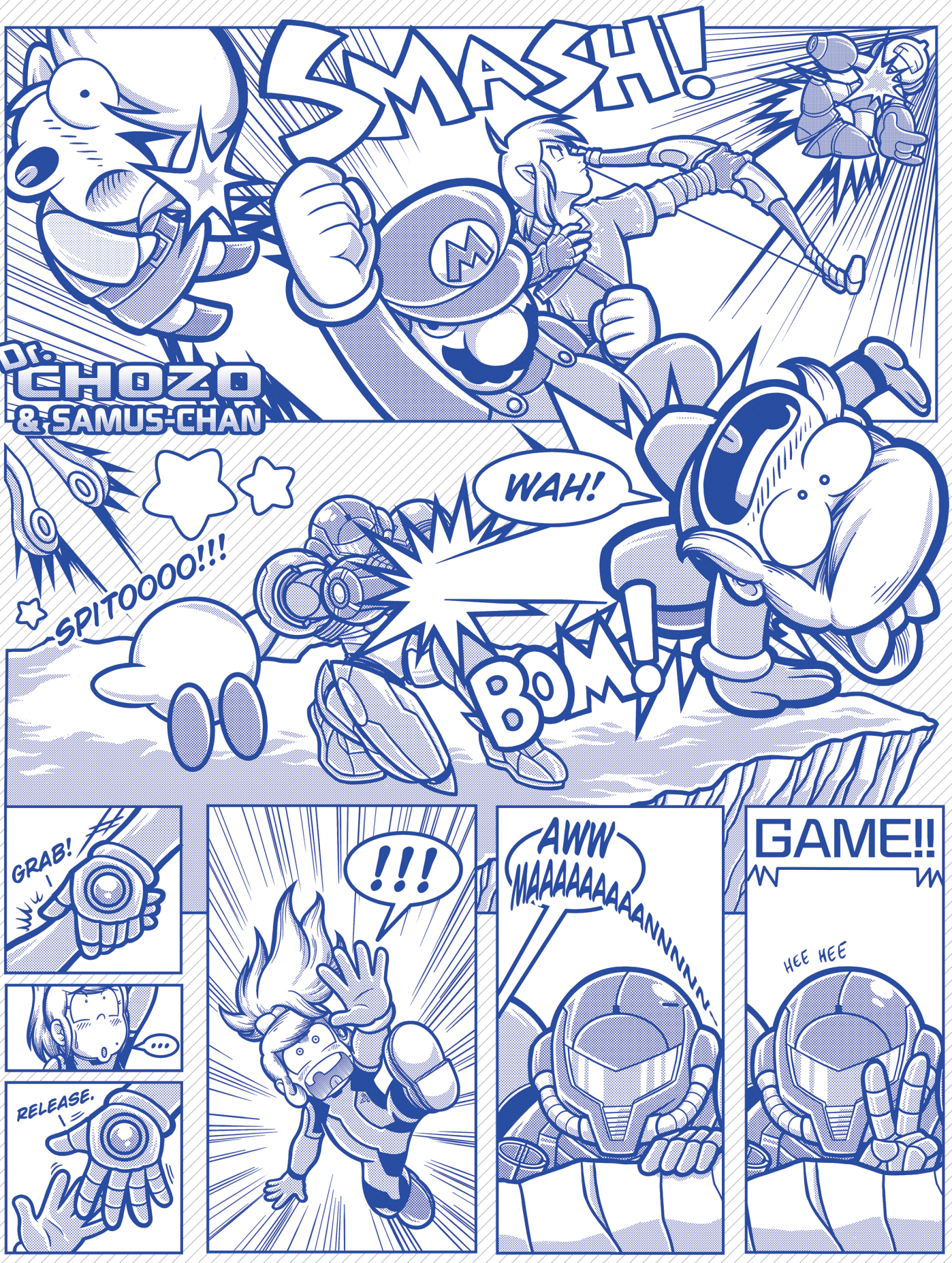
The bow appears for the basic Neutral Special, and it's able to charge up a super shot that flies across the entire arena, packing a major punch. You have to commit to it, though, leaving you vulnerable at close range.

Byleth's Side Special brings out the legendary spear Areadbhar — it swipes out in a large arc to threaten foes and keep them wary of trying to get in close. The Up Special uses the Sword of the Creator in its disjointed, segmented whip-like form, serving as a tether recovery similar to the ones used by Ivysaur, Zero Suit Samus, Joker and the Belmonts. The best, though? The Down Special, which brings out the massive ancient axe Aymr. It's a slow blow, but hugely powerful and beautifully satisfying when it connects perfectly. With Super Armor active on startup, you can sometimes wade into a group and crush multiple foes at once. Hitting with Aymr is so fun that it almost salvages the entire character, honestly!

Almost. I'm still disappointed that we didn't get another new franchise into the game after the preceding four DLC fighters set that precedent. Byleth is fine and all, but the timing of placing this reveal at the end of the Fighters Pass? A total misfire.

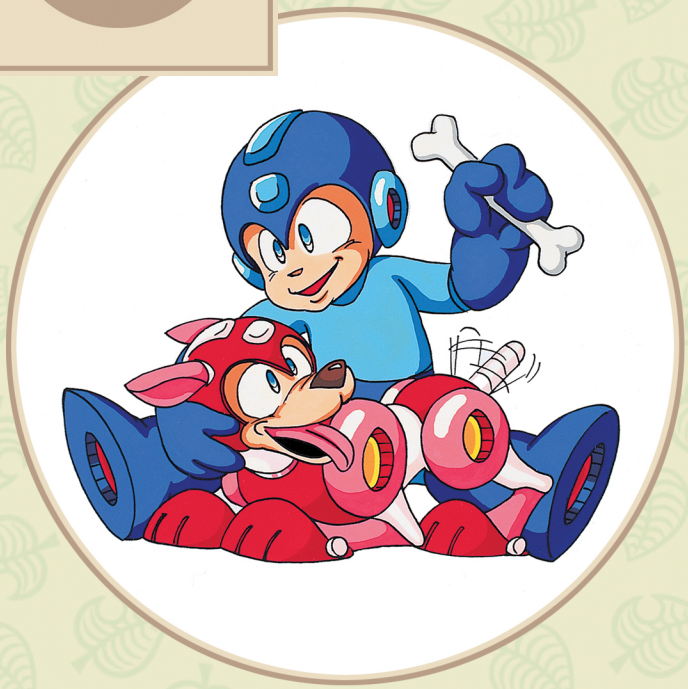
At least we've got Fighters Pass #2 to still look forward to! **— LUCAS**





BY THOR THORVALDSON

Our favorite Animal Buddies ever!



BEAST FRIENDS FOREVER!

EPONA

ONE OF THE stalwart icons of the Zelda series, and for very good reason: Epona is freedom personified. As she and I escaped from the fenced-off Lon Lon Ranch to the wide-open plains of Hyrule Field, it felt like we were united in throwing away the shackles of previous top-down Zelda titles. Together, we explored every inch of a living, breathing polygonal world. In the somber Majora's Mask, the loss of Epona was heartbreaking. I worried I'd never see her again. When, finally, I rescued her from yet another ranch, it felt like a beautiful reunion with an old friend. No matter how bad things got in Termina, at least I had her. I felt this same feeling when, in Twilight Princess, I first played Epona's Song on a piece of grass, and she galloped to my side. That familiar tune is a call to adventure, as my dear friend and I rush off to save the day yet again. Loftwings and sentient boats may come and go, the Lord of the Mountain may provide a challenge, but there's no other companion I'd rather ride. **— MATTHEW L.**

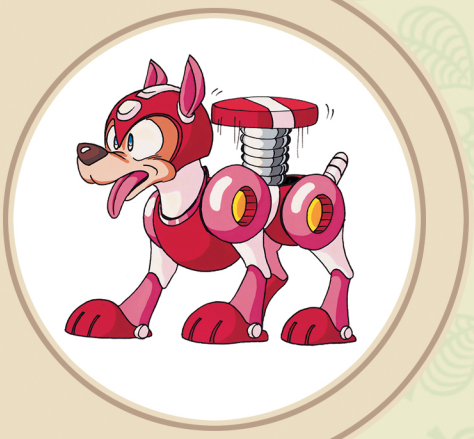
COO

IN KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 2, Kirby got some animal friends: Rick the Hamster, Kine the Fish and Coo the Owl. Coo holds Kirby in his talons and allows him to fly through wind and inhale in the air, but Kirby can also combine powers with the big, bold bird! Some spectacular aerial assaults came at the hands of Coo and Kirby, as the Spark ability created lightning bolts, the Burning ability turned the pair into a meteoric fireball and the Needle ability added spikes to Kirby and just looked dangerous. Ice and Cutter worked very much like a land-based Kirby, but the Stone ability could crush and create openings that others could not. Adding a Parasol would turn the pair into a blustery tornado, and in Kirby's Dream Land 3, the Cleaning ability turned Coo into a feather duster! We've seen the pudgy purple owl in various cameos across the series, and he was even part of a Dream Friend trio in Kirby Star Allies. Coo is forever loyal and has the ability to hold relationships with others that, in the real animal kingdom, would be considered food for an owl! **— BRETT**

INTERCEPTOR

EVERY TIME I had Shadow in my party while playing Final Fantasy VI, I knew he'd be safe from harm, thanks to his faithful canine companion, Interceptor — although this sleek Doberman should've been named "Tank." In battle, he can block attacks on his master, and it's amazing how much damage he absorbs — seeing him take an attack with a four-digit damage count never fails to make me say, "Whoa!" Whatever Shadow's feeding him that costs 3,000 gil, it *works*. And that's not all! His retaliations, Takedown and Wild Fang, are nothing to sneeze at, either. Despite Shadow's warning that "the dog eats strangers," Interceptor can be a huge puppy sometimes: You can see him eagerly react to getting a treat in the dining car on the Phantom Train, and he befriends Relm when the party travels to Thamasa, even helping to save her from a burning house. Most fittingly, if you decide to leave without Shadow in your escape from the Floating Continent, Interceptor becomes the protector of Relm — revealed to be Shadow's daughter — instead. **— REBECCA**

RUSH



A BOY AND his dog: Is there any pairing more classic in fiction? So when it came time to give Mega Man a sidekick to join him on his adventures, the clear answer was a robotic dog who would be named Rush. When laying the smackdown on reprogrammed renegade robots, few companions are better to have at your side than man's – or rather, Mega Man's – best friend, who provides a variety of utilitarian uses. Ledge you can't reach? Use the Rush Coil to spring into action! Bed of spikes too wide to cross? Marty McFly your way over them with the Rush Jet! Don't know how to swim? Call in the Rush Marine! Plus, you don't have to take him for a walk in the cold! While growing up (and still as an adult, not gonna lie), having a robot dog who could turn into most anything just seemed like the coolest thing in the world. Now, all these years later, it's good to see that while not every previous cast member was able to return in Mega Man 11, Rush still remains by the Blue Bomber's side, ready to spring into action! **– DAVID**

MISSILE

I NEVER HAD a puppy of my own – the closest I've ever come to being a doggy daddy has been the times I took care of my brother's fur baby while he was away on business. But should pet adoption await me in the future, I would hope my new best friend is every bit as loyal and noble as Ghost Trick's Missile. Modeled after director Shu Takumi's own Pomeranian, Missile was the game's breakout star, endearing himself to players with his naive exuberance, as well as his tireless efforts to prevent the deaths of his mistresses. A ghost pupper with the power to reverse time and instantly swap the positions of similarly shaped objects? Who *wouldn't* want a fluffy supernatural partner who stops at nothing to manipulate fate to save the ones he loves!? My former Destructoid cohort Chad Concelmo and I once emailed each other back and forth to discuss all the ways Missile is amazing, so much that we had to compile our thoughts in an editorial tribute. There's no stronger male bonding activity than professing your mutual adoration for "Good Boys!" **– TONY**

LUCARIO

IN THE WORLD of Pokémon, literally every critter you meet can become your best friend! My favorite battlin' buddy is the Fighting and Steel dual-type dynamo, Lucario. First introduced in 2006 as part of the fourth generation of Pokémon games, Lucario's pre-evolved form Riolu was received as an egg and evolved into Lucario when his friendship level was high enough. Lucario has also been the main subject of a Pokémon movie and is a playable character in the Super Smash Bros. game series. With the release of each new generation I've always made sure to include a Lucario on my traveling team; his typing and wide range of available moves make him a powerful partner (and luckily later generations made obtaining Riolus easier). Pokémon X & Y went so far as to both offer early wild encounters of Riolus and just straight-up give you a Lucario after the fourth gym battle! That was how I ended up with *two* Lucarios on my team in that generation, both named after fictional boxers: Rocky Balboa and Clubber Lang! **– THOR**

PRINCE TRICKY

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED to find anyone who'd say a nice thing about Prince Tricky, Fox's chatty dinosaur sidekick in Star Fox Adventures for GameCube. The crown prince of the EarthWalkers travels by your side throughout nearly the entire adventure, serving as your guide and occasionally helping you solve puzzles with his unique abilities. This wouldn't be so bad, were it not for the fact the little dino will not. Stop. *Talking.* Every few moments, you'll hear Tricky whining about being hungry or asking you to play, which can grow old pretty quickly when you're trying to fend off a horde of SharpClaws or suss out the solution to a puzzle. Still, as much of a nuisance as Tricky can be, it's hard not to develop a soft spot for the little guy by the end of the journey. He may be a pain in the tail, but his abilities do come in handy. The world of Sauria is littered with obstacles that can only be overcome with Tricky's aid, making him an indispensable ally. Sure, he can get on your last nerve, but Star Fox Adventures wouldn't be the same without him! **— KEVIN K.**

JEANE

"WHAT'S THE POINT of having a cat?" It's a question that dog people have asked me for years. My usual answer is, "The point of having a cat is the same as with anything else in life: Have the best relationship with it that you can, and enjoy it while it lasts." With cats, that's usually pretty easy to achieve. Feed them, scoop the litter, play with them, let them sit on you and purr, and you have yourself an A+ relationship with no complications. In No More Heroes, feeding and petting your cat Jeane offers no apparent rewards at first. It's just something to do in your lonely life in order to pass time between action missions. Over the course of the game, you learn that your adorable tabby carries much more meaning than you might have guessed, and her presence in the series only grows from there. In No More Heroes 2, she needs to lose weight and becomes your workout partner, then in Travis Strikes Again, she starts sending you faxes through an old-fashioned fax machine. We can only guess what this versatile feline will be up to in No More Heroes 3! **— JONATHAN**

THE DACHORA

EXPLORING SUPER METROID after getting the Speed Booster was incredibly fun, but when I accidentally boosted myself through the floor in Brinstar and fell down a giant hole, I was concerned about how I'd get myself out. Then I met the Dachora. Unlike the other creatures I'd encountered, the Dachora wasn't out to get me. Instead of attacking, it chose to help me by demonstrating a power I didn't even know I had! After that, I met the adorable Etecoons who taught me to wall jump with a song and a dance, and the mysterious Shaktool that cleared the path to the Spring Ball, and suddenly Zebes stopped being just a video game planet full of murderous monsters. It was alive . . . until I blew it up. Thankfully you have the option to save your animal buddies before you do. (Well, except the Shaktool. Rest in peace my strange digging robot friend.) These wonderful creatures make Zebes feel so much more genuine, and show that exploring isn't about just finding secret passageways, but about discovering the unexpected as well. **— KRIS**

GEX

HEY KIDS! Do you want to experience the most annoying 1990s video game mascot out there? Then Gex is your gecko! He's a pop culture-obsessed couch potato! He makes snarky comments about everything! He's voiced by Dana Gould for some reason! You can practically hear the marketing pitch for this character every time he says or does anything. Gex's quips range from "terrible" to "I don't even get what the joke's supposed to be," and he jabbers so often that you'll want to throw him off a cliff. His games are meant to parody television channels, but the developers clearly ran out of ideas once they decided that "Egyptian pyramid" and "pirate ship" counted as TV shows. Plus his arch-nemesis Rez is a . . . TV monster or something? Their relationship is never explained — unless you count the lame Star Wars joke where Rez says he's Gex's father. Ha ha ha . . . get it? When I heard this line, I realized that the sheer obnoxiousness of Gex was impressive in its own way. Perhaps we're due for a revival! A horrible, unfunny revival! **— LINDSEY**

THE OWL

WHEN I WAS playing . . . Huh? What's with my game? Oh, it's the Owl. Say where? Oh, thanks. The Owl is a great character because he gives you information about where to go. Owls are also great characters for jokes. Hey Owl! Why are you here in the daytime? You can also look up where the Owl spoke to you at different times. The latest I know is when he speaks to you at the Egg after you open it. I played everything, but I can't get past the Egg. I like tons of stuff about video games: the way you win, how long it is, the techniques, and I love the music! I also love the music when the Owl comes. They should make a fortress course in Super Mario Maker 2 so I can listen to its great music! It makes sense the Owl knows all the stuff he says to you. Owls are wise! I know other owls that help you, like Coo and Heavy Zed. But those characters just help you fly! Plus Heavy Zed is just in one course. But I'm just Blathers, who is about to go to sleep . . . **— CARTER**

WINKY

LAST BUT NOT the least leggy, it's everyone's favorite Animal Friend from the Donkey Kong Country series, Winky the Frog! . . . Uh, what's that? You don't remember Winky!? Why, that's patently absurd! He's the long-leaping legend! The amphibian of altitude! The jump-jivin' . . . yeah, OK. He's kind of forgettable, I'll admit. But not to me! Donkey Kong Country made a huge impression on young Lucas back in 1994, as I was genuinely taken aback by how gorgeous its graphics were. Rare's computer-generated character models captivated my brain, and when I actually played it? My mind was blown. My favorite parts, of course, were when Donkey and Diddy encountered Animal Crates, busted them open and found a new friend inside to ride. Rambi, Enguarde and even Squawks the Parrot went on to longer careers in the series, but Winky only showed up in DKC1, and only then in a few scattered stages — so every appearance felt special! This frog could bounce off the backs of Zingers and not get hurt! He's an unsung superstar! **— LUCAS**

The History of

Animal Crossing™

A Walk with the Animals

Hey, man.
So you heard about Nook's new island gig?
I might just have to head out there myself.
Play some jams in the ocean breeze, you know.
Before you go, check this.
It's always good to remember where you've been
before you sail for new shores.

DŌBUTSU NO MORI

THE WESTERN WORLD got its first taste of Animal Crossing on the GameCube, but the series actually originated on Nintendo's previous home console, the N64. Its debut installment, Dōbutsu no Mori (or Animal Forest, as we'll call the game from this point on), was one of the final titles to hit the aging 64-bit system, arriving in April 2001 — just a few months ahead of GameCube's launch. Due to this unfortunate timing, the N64 game was never released outside of Japan, but it would eventually get a second lease on life.

Much like Natsume's Harvest Moon, Animal Forest was a charming, laid-back life sim that turned day-to-day tasks like cleaning into a satisfying gameplay loop. But whereas the underlying goal of Natsume's series was to revitalize an ailing farm, the premise of Animal Forest was much simpler: Live out life as you please. You could spend your days running errands for your animal neighbors, decorating your house with new pieces of furniture, catching fish and insects or simply taking part in the various holidays that would occur throughout the year. All of this was facilitated by an internal clock — days would pass and seasons would change in real time, so something new was happening each time you loaded the game.

If that sounds almost identical to Animal Crossing on GameCube, there's a good reason: The GameCube title was actually a port of Animal Forest. Nintendo brought the game over to its newer system in December 2001, just eight months after its N64 release. This version would then be localized and released in the States the following September. But while the title was left largely unchanged in its move to new hardware, Nintendo had to make some significant tweaks when bringing it to a new country.

In particular, many of the game's events had to be altered. Since the original game was intended for a Japanese audience, its more Japan-centric holidays were either removed or replaced with events that would be more familiar to international players, such as the Harvest Festival (Thanksgiving). Along with some other superficial changes — the bell shrine in the town plaza was replaced by a wishing well, for instance — the Western version boasted new features like e-Reader support. Nintendo was so impressed by the Western release that it was re-localized for Japan in 2003 as Dōbutsu no Mori e+, bringing the game full circle! **— KEVIN K.**

PLATFORM: NINTENDO 64 **RELEASE DATE:** APRIL 14, 2001 (ONLY IN JAPAN)

ANIMAL CROSSING

ANIMAL CROSSING MAY have technically gotten its start on the N64, but it was the titular GameCube entry that introduced the series to the world. Released in the States in 2002, Animal Crossing was a bold new type of game for Nintendo: a leisurely, open-ended life sim completely bereft of the company's usual mascots (although it contained plenty of references to other Nintendo titles, from Super Mario shirts to replica Arwings and Master Swords).

A big part of what made Animal Crossing feel so unique and refreshing when it first arrived was its free-form nature. You could spend your time in the game doing whatever you liked — you could go fishing at the beach, or deliver a lost Pocket Pikachu to a forgetful neighbor. The game imposed no overarching goal or story threads on players, but rather gave you the freedom to pursue your own interests.

Another vital aspect of Animal Crossing's appeal was that it genuinely felt like a small, living world inside your GameCube. Thanks to the system's internal clock, days and seasons would pass by in the game in real time — leaves and grass would brown out in autumn, and snow would blanket the fields and rooftops during winter. Different insects and fish would also emerge depending on the time of the year, and special holidays would take place on certain days. All of this evoked the sense that something was always happening in the game, whether or not you were playing.

To convey Animal Crossing's unconventional premise, Nintendo came up with a new designation for it: a "communication game." While the title wasn't *quite* as genre-bending as this new genre name suggested, it did encourage new ways for families to play together. The game allowed up to four players to reside in the same town, and while only one could play at a time, they could leave messages or items behind for the other players to discover when they checked in, fostering a communal feel.

Subsequent Animal Crossing games would improve upon the ideas introduced here, but the GameCube entry remains unique thanks to some elements (like fully playable NES games!) that wouldn't reappear in future titles. The title would eventually go on to sell more than 2,000,000 copies worldwide, making it a rousing success for Nintendo! **— KEVIN K.**

PLATFORM: GAMECUBE **RELEASE DATE:** SEPTEMBER 16, 2002

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

WHILE THE FRANCHISE may have begun life on the N64 all the way back in 2001, for many, the Nintendo DS release of Animal Crossing: Wild World in 2005 is where the series truly began.

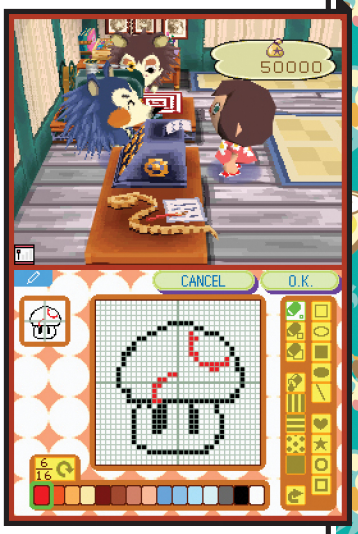
This iteration helped evolve the franchise into the form most recognizable to fans today, from the "rolling log" landscapes to the use of online connectivity (through the now-defunct Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection), which allowed players to visit their friends' villages across the world from the comfort of their own sofa. Now trading could be performed without the cumbersome use of a password shipping system.

It also put the two screens of the DS handheld to good use, allowing for touchscreen controls, which not only facilitated more casual button-less gameplay, but also easier item and menu manipulation. Unlike its Nintendo 3DS successor, Wild World placed the action on the bottom screen, giving players a clear view of the sky overhead on the top screen. More than just a mere aesthetic choice, this extended functionality in a few ways, including being able to see balloons pass by overhead as you attempt to shoot them down for the prizes in the attached boxes. What's more, on a clear night, players can see a variety of constellations that can be drawn (using the touchscreen, of course) in the observatory.

Another difference, which has persisted since, is the matter of housing. Simply put, rather than each player in a village receiving their own abode as before, they all now share one house — which is ironically more evocative of the "Real World"-esque commercials for the GameCube installment's Western release.

New characters made their debut in this installment as well, including the café barista Brewster, observatory operator Celeste, and Harriet, who allows you to change up your hairdo. Returning characters will also herald new features, such as the Able Sisters, who now allowed players to design their own patterns and clothing using the DS touchscreen in a fashion similar to Mario Paint or Mario Kart DS.

Unfortunately, with all the new content coming in, some of the old content had to go, including fixtures such as the train and police stations. But most regrettable was the omission of the NES games! **— DAVID**



PLATFORM: NINTENDO DS **RELEASE DATE:** DECEMBER 5, 2005

DŌBUTSU NO MORI: THE MOVIE

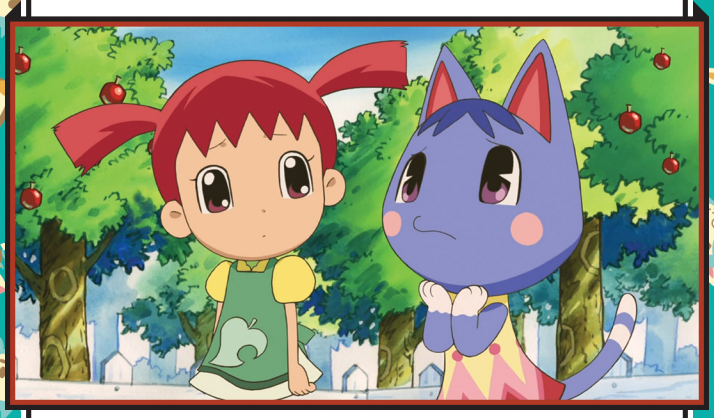
MOVING TO A new place all by yourself, finding a job, making new friends and trying to figure out what you want to do with your life is something we can all relate to. Now imagine experiencing all that as an independent little girl in the world of Animal Crossing! Released in 2006 by Toho Pictures and animated by OLM (the animators of the Pokémon anime), Dōbutsu no Mori: The Movie is an animated feature based on Animal Crossing: Wild World, soon after it became a multimillion seller in Japan.

When Ai moves to Animal Village, she has a lot of trouble fitting in at first. But while working as a delivery porter for Tom Nook, she finds a couple of good friends in Rosie the Cat and Margie the Elephant. She also meets a few other friendly faces, like Yuu, the boy who lives in the neighboring village and loves cosplaying, bug catching and fossil finding with his best friend, Alfonso the Alligator. Ai and her friends take in festivals and beach days and go on adventures together, including an exciting fossil hunt that leads them to a massive Seismosaurus fossil in a dangerous waterfall cave.

There's also a series of mysterious messages in bottles that Ai keeps discovering that relate to a "miracle" that will happen at the Winter Festival. Later, when Margie unexpectedly moves away to pursue her dream of becoming a world-famous fashion designer, Ai becomes downtrodden and discouraged, but perks up with encouragement from some of the other villagers. She also remembers her conversations with Margie about finding your talents, which they compare to making their own cherry pie. In the end, not only does Ai find her cherry pie, but many more of the villagers have had their dreams fulfilled, too.

It's a slow-paced slice-of-life movie that stays truly faithful to the source material (literally at one point: K.K. Slider's rendition of K.K. Bossa during the Fireworks Festival is taken directly from the game audio), and a lot of the regular Animal Crossing characters — like Tortimer, the pelican siblings, Katie and her Mom, and Kapp'n — make appearances, both speaking and non-speaking. (Fun fact: Pascal the Otter is portrayed by Japanese film director Takashi Miike, who's no stranger to movie adaptations of video games.) Watching this film is like getting a cup of coffee from The Roost: a warm pick-me-up that's best savored after a rough day. It's also somewhat on the short side, clocking in at an hour and a half.

While the movie was never officially released outside of Japan and was only available on region-locked DVD, groups of intrepid fans have produced fansubs and fandubs for those who want to seek out Ai's cherry pie-finding adventures for themselves. **— REBECCA**



THEATRICAL DEBUT: DECEMBER 16, 2006 (ONLY IN JAPAN)

ANIMAL CROSSING: CITY FOLK

IN BOTH THE original game and Wild World, you settle yourself into a countryside village where you fish, gather fruit and plant trees. But what if Nintendo took that formula and gave it a more urban spin, where you settle in a big city and performed more metro-oriented tasks?

Unfortunately, if that was the kind of experience the name "Animal Crossing: City Folk" brought to mind, then you might have been disappointed by its 2008 release. Even so, Nintendo had high aspirations early on for the game, ranging from motion controls to using the now-defunct WiiConnect24 to allow other players to visit your town, even when you weren't playing. These were scaled back considerably, as the optional motion controls weren't very involved, and WiiConnect24 was only used to deliver distributed items (i.e. downloadable content) from Nintendo themselves.

Another new feature, and one unique to this installment, was the Wii Speak microphone. With this device plugged into the USB port of the Wii, players could speak to one another when they got together in their respective towns. It was included in the early runs of the title, but would be left out of later re-releases, and is no longer usable.

Perhaps the biggest new feature to be included in Animal Crossing: City Folk was in the form of the game's namesake, The City. While players couldn't live in the city, they were still free to take a bus and visit whenever they liked — though whether or not anything would be open is another matter. Many of the characters who acted as special visitors to the player's town (or just had operations there) in previous games had now set up shop in The City, such as Redd, Lyle, Gracie, Dr. Shrunk and Harriet. New characters, such as Kicks and Phineas, were also there to offer their wares and services. While some of these characters' appearances may not be as special anymore, at least they were a little more convenient.

In many ways, City Folk was not unlike a console version of Wild World, and this was further emphasized by the series' first — and, to date, last — implementation of the ability to "move" your character from the DS game to the Wii. In actuality, this was more of a bare-bones copying of the character's name and basic appearance. While the City Folk version would start without any of the Wild World version's items (save for a few Nintendo-related pieces), clothing, patterns or Bells, most of the fare unlocked in their catalog would carry over, making the process of starting over a little bit easier. **— DAVID**

PLATFORM: Wii **RELEASE DATE:** NOVEMBER 6, 2008

ANIMAL CROSSING DSiWARE APPS

MICROTRANSACTIONS ARE A tricky beast. In 2006, Apple's iPhone proved that customers were willing to throw a dollar or two at a mobile app that would have been free on a traditional PC, kicking off a veritable gold rush as tech companies scrambled to start nickel-and-diming their customers.

Nintendo was not immune to the appeal of microtransactions, and thus, the DSi was born; the company's first earnest attempt at providing downloadable content for players. The DSi could play DS games, but it could also download cheap digital games and apps that mirrored the offerings available in Apple's App Store.

Some of this DSiWare was fairly substantial, such as Shantae: Risky's Revenge, which eventually made its way to the Wii U. Other offerings, such as Animal Crossing Clock and Animal Crossing Calculator, are far less worthwhile.

Animal Crossing Clock is, as the name suggests, a clock. That's it. The app exists solely to tell the time, and has an alarm function. Yes, the clock has an Animal Crossing skin, and the alarms sound like familiar jingles from the games, but other than that, the app has no unique selling point.

It's worth bearing in mind that the DSi has a free clock built in, and that it displays the time on the home screen. To get to the Animal Crossing Clock app, you literally have to navigate past a far more convenient clock that tells you the time at a glance.

Slightly more useful is the Animal Crossing Calculator, which is (you've guessed it!) a calculator with an Animal Crossing background. This at least provides a function that isn't installed on the DSi by default, and it does look very pretty. It even has a measurement conversion function, which is particularly useful if you constantly need to know how many centimeters there are in an inch.

The big problem with both of these apps is that the DSi was not more convenient than the smartphones that were becoming commonplace at the time. Eventually, we all realized that we could own both a smartphone and a Nintendo handheld without feeling encumbered.

These apps do have merit from a historical perspective. That said, you really don't need to try these. There's not much to try. **— MATTHEW L.**

PLATFORM: DSiWARE **RELEASE DATE:** MAY 4, 2009

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

FOR THE FIRST time, Animal Crossing: New Leaf on the Nintendo 3DS featured your villager not as just another neighbor, but the new mayor of your new hometown! Your town starts out barren, with a main street filled with boarded-up storefronts. As you get to know your neighbors and earn their approval, you'll be able to bring all the old amenities from past games — and a few new ones — to your town, such as a fortune-telling shop for Katrina, K.K. Slider's Club LOL and Kicks' shoe store. You can also build monuments and other structures in town, like Brewster's coffee house, a police station, bridges and even an underground surveillance center for Mr. Resetti!

Along with new hamster and deer villagers, there were a few new faces in every town, like Reece and Cyrus, the alpaca couple who own resale shop Re-Tail. But the most popular new addition was Isabelle, your perky assistant. This sweet shih tzu with the jingle bell hair tie ended up being made into plush toys, Nendoroids and amiibo, and her pup-ularity led to her becoming the new face of the entire franchise!

New Leaf also made ample use of the 3DS' wireless communication capabilities. Isabelle's twin brother, Digby, ran the Happy Home Showcase, a gallery of other players' homes tagged by StreetPass that allowed you to explore and order furniture from them. You can also travel with Kapp'n to Tortimer Island, where you can meet up with other players and pick fruit, catch bugs and fish and partake in minigames. And, as always, you could travel to other towns, and even visit them using your town's Dream Suite, which let you play in a "read only" version of a friend's town using a password.

After the release of Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer, an update, "Welcome amiibo," was added to New Leaf in 2016, allowing you to scan any amiibo or amiibo card to unlock special items and move in new villagers — including special villagers based on characters from Monster Hunter, The Legend of Zelda and Splatoon! Another set of 50 amiibo cards for new villagers was released, and in Europe and Japan, a special set of six amiibo cards featuring villagers based on various Sanrio characters were released as well.

With all these features and the huge user base — over 12,000,000 copies have been sold worldwide — it's not surprising that New Leaf has remained a favorite of AC fans since its initial release. There are photos and posts online of people who have been playing in the same village since they originally got the game! Are you one of them? **— REBECCA**

PLATFORM: NINTENDO 3DS **RELEASE DATE:** JUNE 9, 2013

ANIMAL CROSSING: SWEET DAY

WELL BEFORE NINTENDO and Universal locked eyes outside of a courtroom, there was always the question: "What if Nintendo had their own theme park?" At the time, the answer came in the Wii U pack-in title, Nintendo Land.

Featuring a plethora of minigame "attractions," Nintendo Land drew from franchises both prominent and obscure from throughout the company's history. From Balloon Fight, F-Zero and The Mysterious Murasame Castle to Metroid, The Legend of Zelda and, of course, Mario, there was something for everyone. And for the fans of Animal Crossing, any day at the park could be a Sweet Day.

Interestingly, Animal Crossing: Sweet Day (known in Japan as "Animal Forest Candy Festival") was one of only three competitive attractions at the park (not counting the remixed Attraction Tour), sharing that spotlight with two marquee names in Mario Chase and Luigi's Ghost Mansion.

The two to five players participating are cast in the roles of either animal villagers Dizzy, Lily, Peanut and Tangy, or the familiar faces of Booker and Copper, with Miis donning the appropriate costumes. As villagers, players use Wii Remotes to move around one of the three stages and collect candies scattered about and hidden in trees, with the goal being to gather a certain number (based on the number of players participating) before time runs out. The more they collect, though, the slower they'll move! Hilariously, each character's costume animal head grows larger with every candy piece that's picked up. It's a wonder they don't topple!

Showing off the Wii U GamePad's potential for asymmetric gameplay, the GamePad player (or CPU, should the need arise) controls gatekeepers Booker and Copper simultaneously. The duo (each controlled by one thumbstick and shoulder button) try to catch the sweet-snatchers by tackling them, causing them to lose a bunch of their candies in the process. If they can manage to tackle villagers three times, they then win the game.

If only two players are taking part, there's also a Stash Mode available. In this mode, one player has to try to deliver 15 candies to various stash bowls scattered around the map while avoiding the other player.

While other attractions from Nintendo Land might be closely replicable in some sort of follow-up release, the asymmetric aspects of Animal Crossing: Sweet Day might make it one of the more challenging games in the package to faithfully represent away from the Wii U. For now, we'll be keeping our eyes on Super Nintendo World for more theme park-related Animal Crossing experiences! **— DAVID**

PLATFORM: Wii U **RELEASE DATE:** NOVEMBER 18, 2012

ANIMAL CROSSING PLAZA

EVER HEARD SOMEONE say the phrase "Well, you had to be there" before? That's this game in a nutshell. A limited-time, limited-scope experience that existed only about as long as a whisper on the wind, then faded away from this world.

Animal Crossing Plaza was a Wii U eShop download that was first made available, for free, in August 2013. It was planned to be a temporary thing from the start, though — right when it was announced in a Nintendo Direct broadcast, Mr. Iwata said that it would only stick around until the end of the following year. And, sure enough, it was delisted in December 2014. Any Animal Crossing fans who missed out on that window of time — just a little over a year — have unfortunately missed out on the Plaza forever.

Not that they're missing much. Nintendo called this download a "game," but it didn't really have any gameplay to speak of. It was basically just a reskinning of the Wii U's normal opening menu screen, except instead of a swarm of random Mii characters milling around and pointing you toward new Miiverse posts in floating speech bubbles, Plaza had a swarm of Animal Crossing characters milling around a tree and doing the same thing.

Even Miiverse itself is now no more, so it's hard to capture the experience in hindsight, but it was Nintendo's own social media platform for Wii U users to use while that console was still alive and kicking. Plaza provided a bridge between that service and Animal Crossing: New Leaf on the 3DS, allowing players to get social and chat about their favorite animal neighbors in discussion threads dedicated to each one, as well as share gameplay photos captured in New Leaf through some swapping of an SD card out of the portable and into the Wii U. New Leafers could also discover new patterns to use on shirts and more by browsing through these forums, then project the QR code for each in a large size on the TV, point the 3DS camera at the screen and snap a pic to get it imported into their handheld village.

It was all a little odd and unwieldy. Like Nintendo was trying to make some kind of worthwhile connection between the portable village life experience and the TV console experience, but without actually publishing a new mainline series sequel on the Wii U. Lots of players accepted Plaza and its limitations for what they were, at the time, because they hoped it was just a stepping stone to a real Wii U game that would come later. That had to be why they went to the trouble of bringing all the animal characters into HD, right? Well, maybe the fact that they were still pretty blocky and low-res should have been a clue . . . — **LUCAS**

PLATFORM: Wii U **RELEASE DATE:** AUGUST 7, 2013

ANIMAL CROSSING CROSSOVERS!

WHAT'S THE MARK of having "made it" in the world of Nintendo? Well, when cameos from your game series start popping up in other games series also owned by the Big N!

The Villager from Animal Crossing has a remarkable "made it" moment. It took place back at E3 2013, in the trailer announcing the impending arrival of the Super Smash Bros. series on both the 3DS and the Wii U. It didn't even look like a trailer for Smash at first — it opened in a gorgeous HD Animal Crossing town with a brief scene showing the series' standard male Villager character checking his mailbox. Inside was what we've come to know as the iconic Smash invitation envelope — but it was the first-ever appearance of that item! After a general gameplay hype reel starring past Smash fighters introducing both games, Villager then swept into the scene and captured Mario inside his bug net. "Villager Comes to Town!" splashed across the screen — and it was the first time that had happened too! Animal Crossing's Villager was given the honor of both becoming the first new Smash fighter confirmed for the fourth generation of that series, as well as starring in the first trailer that set the standard for all new fighter trailers that have followed along since then.

Another star in one of those subsequent Smash trailers? Isabelle, who was confirmed for the playable cast just before Super Smash Bros. Ultimate went on sale in late 2018. Both fighters do battle in the series in a decidedly non-serious way, attacking their foes by doing such oddball things as planting trees, riding on Gyroids like they're rockets and sending a fishing line zipping out to snag the opposition. Though the actual Animal Crossing series has only general tool usage like chopping away with an axe as actions that even come close to resembling "attacks," Mr. Sakurai and his team nonetheless created two unique movesets based on the assorted items and non-violent mechanics of the series. Brilliant!

But how about an even rarer invite than an ask to join Smash? Both Isabelle and the Villager also joined the racing roster of Mario Kart 8 five years ago. Very few non-Mario character cameos make the cut for Kart — only Link from The Legend of Zelda and the Inklings from Splatoon were also asked! But that's the status the Animal Crossing brand has managed to achieve: It's considered one of Nintendo's Top 4 flagship franchises. Mario, Zelda, Splatoon and Animal Crossing! All four are featured with statues and merchandise collections being sold at the new Nintendo Tokyo store, even.

Where might Animal Crossing characters pop up next? After New Horizons arrives, the possibilities will grow even greater! — **LUCAS**

SUPER SMASH BROS. DEBUT: OCTOBER 3, 2014 **MARIO KART DEBUT:** APRIL 23, 2015

ANIMAL CROSSING: HAPPY HOME DESIGNER

MORE OF A virtual dollhouse game than a whole new Animal Crossing experience, Happy Home Designer was released in conjunction with the Animal Crossing amiibo figures and cards in 2015. It also came in two versions: one game-only version for New Nintendo 3DS users, and one version bundled with a wireless NFC reader/writer for those still gaming on original Nintendo 3DS systems. There was also a Happy Home Designer-branded New Nintendo 3DS, which came with Isabelle and Happy Home Designer cover plates, as well as a digital copy of the game!

As an interior decorator for Nook's Homes, you take requests from villagers and design a house, inside and out, to their specifications. Choose your plot of land, set the landscape to whatever season you want, select the type of siding, roof, fencing and landscaping you want, and go for it! There's no budget to worry about — all that matters is that you include the items your customer specifically requests! Make a dreamland for Pietro, a photography studio for Kidd or a Splatoon arena for Octavian.

Even Isabelle has some assignments for you: You can design commercial buildings — like a school, a department store and a fancy restaurant — that get "staffed" by random Animal Crossing villagers. You've also got free rein to make both regular and pro designs for custom clothing and artwork as well, and the more jobs you take on, the more furniture and other features you can unlock.

While most of your customers are walk-ins off the street, you can summon any customer you want using their amiibo card or figure — including special characters — by calling them on the office's amiibo phone. Once you've designed for them, their new living space can be uploaded as a background decoration to Animal Crossing: amiibo Festival! Every copy of Happy Home Designer included one NPC amiibo card, and packs of three or six amiibo cards (depending on your region) were sold in four series. These later became invaluable in New Leaf's Welcome amiibo update — you could now move in whatever villager you wanted!

Some of the new design and layout options — like hanging clothing on walls as decorations, and the overhead map on the lower screen to help you lay out your room — were later ported to New Leaf in the Welcome amiibo update, and having a copy of both games allowed you to unlock the "giant" furniture available for decorating in Happy Home Designer, like a huge party cake or a giant inflatable Mr. Resetti! **— REBECCA**

PLATFORM: NINTENDO 3DS **RELEASE DATE:** SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

ANIMAL CROSSING: AMIIBO FESTIVAL

AND SO WE arrive at what is collectively considered the lowest point of the entire Animal Crossing franchise. Animal Crossing: amiibo Festival was released for the Wii U three years after the Wii U hardware itself had first gone on sale (so the same point in the life cycle that we're at right now with the Switch), and fans were desperately ready for an all-new console sequel in the mainline series.

They didn't get it.

Maybe because New Leaf had done so well on the 3DS, or because the Wii U had sold so poorly, or some other reason we'll never know, Nintendo decided to break the chain of N64 to GameCube to Wii and leave the Wii U without a core series sequel all its own. Animal Crossing Plaza hadn't been a hint or a tide-the-fans-over download after all. It had just been a tease.

Now, people have been hating on amiibo Festival since even before its release — it was slammed with negativity immediately following its reveal — but I'm one of the few staunch defenders of this spat-upon spin-off experience. My young sons absolutely adored it when it first came out, and we've played it several times in the years since, as they've gotten older, and we've always had a blast.

It's essentially a Mario Party game, just reskinned with the Animal Crossing brand and characters instead. Oh, and, well, it's a lot more limited than the MP standard: It has a virtual board that you move around on to gather Bells and Happy Points, but whereas Mario Party broke away from the board to present some multiplayer minigame in-between each round of movement, amiibo Festival never leaves the dice rolling behind. So I guess it's like half of a Mario Party game.

The selling point meant to hook players into this small-scale experience is the active, constant use of amiibo figures. The amiibo toy craze was truly insane a few years ago, and this Festival released right in the middle of that chaos — right when gaming journalists were wondering why the Big N wasn't doing more with their wildly popular plastic figures' potential for in-game functionality. Unfortunately, in practice, the figures' use here just boiled down to having to tap your chosen character physically on the GamePad every time it came around to your turn to roll the dice.

Just as Metroid fans blasted Federation Force for not being a true sequel in that series when they were desperate for one, so too was amiibo Festival hated for not being a different game than it was. I still happen to like this limited little party game, but I know I'm in the minority! **— LUCAS**

PLATFORM: Wii U **RELEASE DATE:** NOVEMBER 13, 2015

ANIMAL CROSSING: POCKET CAMP

FIRST, YOU WERE but a humble villager, one of many. Then they made you mayor. Now, you're a . . . campsite manager?

It may feel like a bit of a step down from taking on the role of a political position you were never truly elected for, but it's nevertheless fitting for the mobile iteration of the series, Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp.

The title might be different, but your role is still largely the same: Collect lots of stuff and help out the animal vil . . . er, *campers* who come to visit the campground you've designed to your own specifications. To that end, you'll still be planting flowers, catching bugs, shaking trees for fruit and fishing for, well, fish. You can even lend a hand to friends you've made through social media and your My Nintendo account, though you won't interact with them directly — help is literally just a tap away.

Rather than one large area to run around in, the region is divided into several smaller areas. There's your main campsite (sort of your home base), the Market Place, four areas for gathering items to exchange for crafting materials, Shovelstrike Quarry (where you'll mine for minerals to sell) and, upon reaching Level 15, a cabin you can decorate to your liking.

What's that about levels? Unlike other games in the series, Pocket Camp features a leveling system, whereupon you can increase your level by helping campers out and being friendly with them, among other things. Certain items and things, like the aforementioned cabin, won't be available until you've reached the required level.

Don't worry, though, as you'll still have a place to rest: in your camper! Not only can you decorate this RV as you would a home in previous games, but you can also take a spin by OK Motors to meet new characters Giovanni, Carlo and Beppe, who can trick out the exterior of your ride, or even expand your interior space.

Pocket Camp is planned to have some crossover connections with New Horizons, so you may want to try it out while you're waiting for the fresh Switch sequel! **— DAVID**

PLATFORM: MOBILE RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 2017

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ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

Take a deep breath. Relax. Get ready for the slow pace of island life.

ARE YOU A patient person?

Nintendo has certainly put that particular virtue to the test in each and every Animal Crossing fan. After revealing this long-awaited Switch installment in what is likely the company's most beloved franchise all the way back in September 2018, the Big N followed up with months and months of stark silence. Every impatient animal lover was forced to wait until E3 2019 for more information on the sequel . . . only to have it then be delayed from its planned 2019 release all the way to March 20 of this year. We at least got the name of the game last June — New Horizons — as well as a general overview of what sets it apart from previous installments in the series — moving to a deserted island — but then, again, more months of absolute non-communication followed for the "communication game." It's felt odd. Whereas other games are all too happy to blitz would-be players with countless frenetic trailers and a near-constant dripfeed of fresh information sometimes beginning as early as a year or more before the planned launch, and Nintendo could very well have adopted that same tactic here, since fans have been craving more and have been vocal about saying so, still the pace of the run-up to the New Horizons launch has been measured. Slow. Utterly unhurried and perfectly calm about that fact.

Though I'll be the first to admit that my desire for more details has left me frustrated by the snail's pace of their arrival, I think now I understand why, for this particular game, Nintendo has been in no rush. Because the game itself is exactly the same! Playing Animal Crossing is nothing if not an exercise in pure patience, and having the hype cycle reflect that is maybe, hopefully, setting up millions of frantic fans to succeed in a virtual world where nothing ever comes fast. Here, it's sometimes best just to sit.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
RELEASE: MARCH 20, 2020 RATING: E

A SLOW START

The Animal Crossing games have always been relaxed. Because each mainline sequel runs its virtual world in real time — tapping into the internal clocks of each system and taking place in parallel with the real-world calendar ticking off just one day at a time 365 times in a row before starting the annual cycle over again — each individual day within that cycle has never had too much new to do. It's by design. Animal Crossing is not meant to be a series that you play for hours on end on any given day. Rather, you're supposed to check in for maybe a few minutes here and there each day, run a few errands, gather a few things out in the wild, maybe catch a fish and then turn it all off, waiting to return the following day to see what's new then. Nintendo's playing the long game with the AC series — they don't want anyone to feel like they're done with their animal village experience after just a few days, or a week, or a month. They want you locked in for years on end!

New Horizons may very well be even more purposeful about slowing the pace of play than any previous sequel, too. In past games you played as a happy-go-lucky human moving into an existing, established town full of animal neighbors. The world was meant to feel like it already existed before you got there, and then it kept going in perpetuity forever after you put down roots there (whether or not you checked back in frequently or else disappeared for years after you tired of playing). In New Horizons, though, the start-up is much slower. In moving to a deserted island where no one has ever lived before, it's up to you to set up the society from scratch. You'll get just a tent to start out with — not even the empty house of past games — and you'll have to forage for wild resources to use to build your settlement.

At least you won't be alone. You'll arrive by airplane after buying into Tom Nook's Deserted Island Getaway Package, and Tom Nook himself will greet you on the island and live there alongside you, with his nephews Timmy and Tommy in tow. They'll help you get your island up and running by selling you critical items, buying up anything you want to offload and also teaching you how to craft your own tools and pieces of furniture using the series' new DIY workbench. You'll also have two animal neighbors who'll come to the island the same day you do, and they'll trust you to choose where their tents will be set up.

POWER THAT BUILDS

Your two starting neighbors giving you full control over where they live on the island is just the first step in what is a continuous power creep in New Horizons. Or maybe the second — even before that moment comes and before you arrive on the island, you're given a choice between several different island layouts. Do you want an isle with a river running straight down the middle? Or maybe a little more open?

Such choices were never put in the player's hands in past AC games, as village configurations were randomly generated. You just got what you got. But in New Horizons, everything is ultimately changeable.

After playing a while in Tom Hanks Cast Away mode and getting your bearings on the mostly empty land mass, more and more options will open up and expand, well, your horizons. You'll get to upgrade your tent to a house, as in older games, and then you'll be able to upgrade that house several times over (going into debt to Tom Nook to do so, of course). The Nooks' Resident Services tent will transform into a larger building. Shops and special buildings like the Museum will become available to visit. More and more animal neighbors will move in, such that your little deserted island will start to resemble the fully-packed towns of sequels past.

But, again, unlike those older games you'll have much more control in New Horizons. You can pick up and move stores! You can decide which animals you want to invite to live on your island with you (and perhaps even kick out some that you don't care for any more). And speaking of kicking, here's the real kicker: You'll be able to alter the very terrain itself.

It won't be available at first, and likely not until you've invested weeks or maybe even months into building up your island village, but ultimately you'll be granted the power to totally remake the actual land mass of the island to suit your fancy. Want to change the path of a river? You're a

veritable Hercules now, and you can do it. Tired of having to walk the long way around to get up on top of a cliff? Just dig that dirt out of existence and make yourself a smooth, gentle slope instead.

It's wild! And I guess not too surprising of an endpoint for Animal Crossing gameplay to have arrived at now years past the dominance of fully creative games like Minecraft. It'll take a while to reach this point — the start-up will still be slow, and you'll have to be patient as your powers to remake the island as you see fit are granted to you little by little over a long stretch of time — but you will, in New Horizons, become the most powerful Villager the series has even seen.

SHARING THE ADVENTURE

Well, you'll be one of a set of island overlords, at least. You're perfectly welcome to play New Horizons solo, but an even more rewarding (or annoying) experience awaits friends and family members who choose to all play together on the same Switch. Up to eight different people can play the same copy of the game on the same system, and when they do so, they'll all move to the same island together.

Every player will get their own tent, then house, and so on, each going through the same steps to become more capable of altering the island around them. As has always been the case with Animal Crossing games, then, you'll need to be careful who you let live alongside you! You don't want to spend an hour planting a meticulous garden of beautiful flowers and then log back in a day later to find that your little brother has dug them all up as a gag. Cooperation and coordination will go far in creating an island paradise everyone can enjoy — but if you find yourself butting heads with another human resident, well, Nintendo would be happy to sell your family a second Switch system so the troublemaker can be banished to a separate island all their own.

Or maybe you can keep a closer eye on your fellow humans by all playing at the same time! Same-screen multiplayer will support up to four players simultaneously. I'm looking forward to running around the island together with Carter and Calvin at the same time (and we'll try to rope in Mary too). And if we keep the island going for a few years, Cooper and Colson can join in when they're a little older!

CAN YOU RESIST THE CUTENESS?

THE NEW HORIZONS NINTENDO SWITCH

We haven't seen too many Special Edition Switches in the past three years, but Nintendo's hardware designers clearly knew what they were doing in launching this custom console now. This beautiful Animal Crossing: New Horizons Nintendo Switch goes on sale on March 13, one week before the game itself — and if early buzz from the fandom on social media is any indication, it's going to sell like crazy. With those calming colors on the Joy-Con controllers, the Switch Dock adorned with the three Nooks and a patterned backplate, how can you say no?

WHEN PATIENCE PAYS OFF

We've talked in NF in the past about games that are "worth the wait." We haven't always pegged them correctly (looking at you, Mighty No. 9), but I'm confident that Animal Crossing: New Horizons is one you can firmly place your faith in. Nintendo has made us wait for over a decade for this series to finally come back to a console, and I don't think that time has been wasted. The developers have clearly invested those years wisely and are now bringing us the most gorgeous, feature-rich series sequel yet. A game that will be well worth playing patiently, spreading out its experience over the months and years to come. I can't wait! *(Wait, no. I can. I can be patient. I can be patient.)* — **LUCAS**

DOOM ETERNAL

Loss of momentum.

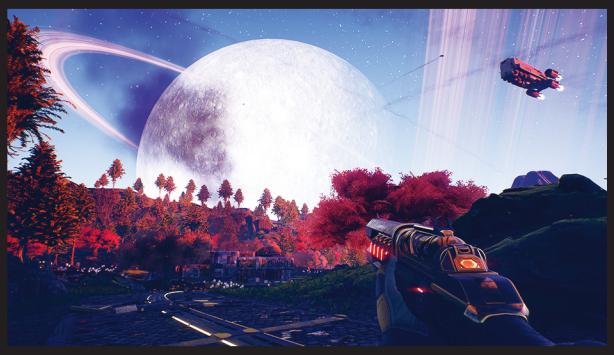
EVEN MORESO THAN its 2016 predecessor was, DOOM Eternal is all about momentum: guiding the guns-blazing Doom Slayer up, over and around huge, open spaces full of gruesome foes and not stopping to rest even after eviscerating said foes in wildly violent ways. The rapid, breathless pace of its playstyle is a major reason so many fans are looking forward to this sequel's fast-approaching release date . . . and also why it's such a shame that, for Switch owners, that release date sadly isn't approaching nearly as fast as we'd hoped.

When we first discussed DOOM Eternal 10 issues ago, I was overjoyed by the very announcement of its existence — because, from the start, Bethesda declared that this sequel would see release on the Switch on the same day as its other versions launched on PS4, Xbox One and PC. I was effusive with my excitement that Nintendo was being restored to a level playing field with Sony and Microsoft for the first time since the GameCube era!

. . . I should have calmed myself down a bit. Because, unfortunately, and despite execute producer Marty Stratton's declaration that the Switch was internally being considered a "first-class citizen" for this DOOM follow-up, his follow-through has fallen through. After a short delay that knocked it out of 2019, DOOM Eternal is now planned to arrive on March 20, 2020 — but only on PS4, Xbox One and PC. Nintendo Switch owners will have to wait, as usual, for some as-yet-unspecified extra span of time beyond that date for a port to appear on our preferred portable/console hybrid.

Having DOOM Eternal and Animal Crossing: New Horizons both hit the Switch on that same day, March 20, was going to be such a fun juxtaposition! But maybe that's just it — the Doom Slayer rushes into battle against demons without care, but he must be scared of Tom Nook! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BETHESDA DEVELOPERS: iD SOFTWARE & PANIC BUTTON RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: M



THE OUTER WORLDS

Adventures in the farthest depths of space!

ASK A FAN of Western RPGs which titles they'd most like to see ported to the Switch, and they'll probably name something from the Mass Effect or Fallout series. But The Outer Worlds is arguably an even better choice, as it's been made by smashing both of those franchises together into one beautiful planet-hopping Western space opera!

Traveling aboard your ship, the Unreliable, you explore the farthest reaches of the galaxy, visiting smoky gambling dens and running afoul of local crime gangs — often with explosive results. It's cut from the same cloth as TV shows like Firefly and The Mandalorian, making the player feel like a daring space adventurer on the fringe of an intergalactic civilization.

The makers of The Outer Worlds, Obsidian Entertainment, are the undisputed masters of this kind of rich storytelling. Best known for creating Fallout: New Vegas, the team also made Knights of the Old Republic II, possibly the darkest and most philosophical of all Star Wars games. Having worked on a variety of franchise titles, the studio has cherry-picked elements from their older work to make their own original property, creating something that plays like a Fallout game, but in space. What's not to love?

Choices really matter in an Obsidian game. Whether you're a fan of talking your way out of trouble or blasting every opponent to pieces, there's generally a solution to every sidequest that fits your playstyle. The Outer Worlds lets you play the hero or the villain, but never lets you escape the consequences of either choice.

It remains to be seen how well The Outer Worlds will run. As with games like DOOM, sometimes sacrifices are inevitable when releasing on the Switch. Regardless, if you've ever dreamed of being a space pirate, The Outer Worlds could very well become your favorite Switch game of the year! **— MATTHEW L.**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: PRIVATE DIVISION DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: M

THE WONDERFUL 101: REMASTERED

It's finally happening!

YEARS AGO, I met with Hideki Kamiya for an interview about his latest project, The Wonderful 101. He remained mostly silent, seemingly irritated with my incessant ramblings of affection for his game. "It's like Okami, Viewtiful Joe and The Avengers all rolled into one!" I squealed, beaming with admiration and gratitude. He shrugged, answering all my questions with one- or two-word answers. Then later on Twitter, he blocked me for thanking him for the interview.

But I'm not bitter. Kamiya-san is definitely not my favorite person in the world to spend an afternoon with, but I love nearly all of his games, and The Wonderful 101 is one of his best. Designed from the ground up for the Wii U, it was originally pitched to Nintendo as a Smash Bros.-style crossover between Mario, Link and other Nintendo mascots. Instead, these archetypes were redesigned as original characters like Wonder Red, Wonder Blue, Wonder Zombie, Wonder Cellphone and even Wonder Bayonetta! There's an infectious lunacy to the game's style that's hard not to root for.

An underdog flop from a commercial standpoint, creatively, it's an unmitigated success. Constantly swapping between the powers of your super team through the use of hand-drawn gestures, flying headfirst into wave after wave of bizarre alien foes and utilizing increasingly complex combos and strategies as you go, the game is equal parts foreign and familiar, blazing with a heart too pure for this world.

That's all changing now that the game is a Kickstarter hit! Platinum is using crowdfunding to bring it to Switch and other platforms — with new content! Though it won't be the same without Wii U controls, I'm all for double-dipping on this wild Kamiya ride! **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES RELEASE: APRIL 2020 RATING: T

MINECRAFT DUNGEONS

Join forces with friends to fight and explore!

WHILE MINECRAFT IS largely about, well, *crafting*, that's not the entire emphasis of the massive mega hit game. It also encourages exploration! And has elements of combat against enemy characters as well. Those secondary aspects are now being thrust into the spotlight of an all-new spin-off that sidelines the crafting gameplay altogether in favor of an action-oriented dungeon crawl. It's Minecraft Dungeons!

Now, in general, "dungeon crawler" is a genre that's never been too well represented across Nintendo systems. Certainly not by Nintendo directly! The company has *just* stepped up to help bring the new Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl — Gold to the Switch (see our review later in this issue), but in the decades prior you'd have to look to games like the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon series to find any kind of first-party analogue. And that isn't even a good comparison, because the PMDs are turn-based! So Mojang's definitely found a gap in the overall Nintendo library that could stand to be filled a little further.

Minecraft Dungeons will be a straightforward action romp for you and up to three other friends. You'll slash, blast and bash your way through waves of enemies as you explore mysterious forests, trap-filled fortresses and, yes, mines, all while hunting for loot to upgrade the offensive and defensive capabilities of your blocky-bodied adventurers. Character customization seems key, too!

These Dungeons will open up beginning in April! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XBOX GAME STUDIOS DEVELOPER: MOJANG RELEASE: APRIL 2020 RATING: RP

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RELEASE: APRIL 24, 2020 RATING: T

TRIALS OF MANA

An overlapping story of interwoven destinies! Who will you choose?

THERE ARE A total of six different main characters to choose from in Trials of Mana, and each has their own personal narrative. Two secondary party members players also choose can help shape the story, add extra dialogue and branch things out with extra story arcs. This means the game has a lot of replay value! There are even three different villains to meet in the game based on who you choose — but all seem to be bent on the same goal, meaning the last part of the game sort of shapes up the same way, just with different motivations.

The first time I played "Seiken Densetsu 3" on a converted cart on my SNES, I chose Duran, Angela and Hawkeye. This is who I essentially try to pick in any RPG when it's an option: a warrior, a healer and an auxiliary character I'm interested in who can aid in combat competently. I'm not sure I'd choose that combo again, as Angela is more of a mage than a healer — but I didn't have much to go on before I started. So, I had a bit of an unbalanced team, but was able to power through anyway, for the most part. Duran is definitely a good warrior, but Hawkeye lacks a little in combat as his attacks are short-range and can leave him exposed. For my new run, I intend to pick Kevin, Charlotte and Riesz for two reasons: I haven't yet used those characters, and it's the well-balanced team I wanted in the first place! Kevin is a well-rounded brute, Charlotte has the healing magic and Riesz is an interesting fighter dealing in both light and dark magic.

I can't wait to see the storylines be more fleshed out with cutscenes and a more robust art style. Not that the 2D version available currently in the Switch's Collection of Mana is hurting for beauty! In fact, it may be worth it to play the old style with a few characters first so you can appreciate the newer style and all of the modernity that comes along with it.

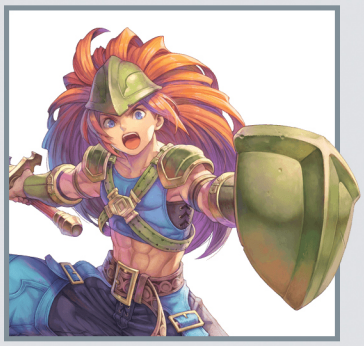
Speaking of additions, the 16-bit soundtrack of the original was great, so getting a more augmented aural experience also has me very excited.

From what little we've seen in trailers, the battle system looks quite different than the original. I wonder if the same combat weaknesses and strengths will be worked into the new system? There was a lot that was similar to the Secret of Mana battle system, and a lot of that was complicated and unexplained.

Secret of Mana had attacks you had to charge in a vulnerable state, and also leveling based on how often you used weapons and magic. In Trials, everything relied more traditionally on XP, but that didn't mean any less grinding — at least in the 2D version. Naturally I hope that there's less grinding involved in this 3D remake — but if the 2018 PS4 remake of Secret of Mana is any indication, they'll remain true to the original.

With attacking, players had to fill a gauge first with simpler attacks in order to unleash a more powerful attack when the time was right. This may be altered quite a bit, as dodging looks like it now involves jumping, timing and character-specific moves. This has so many implications, as each enemy will have to be adapted to fit the new schema. My big hope is that AI characters are smarter, as they had a tendency to rush headlong into battle and waste all of their MP on low-level enemies.

Whatever is changed and whatever stays the same, it's going to be an experience to remember . . . and hopefully Square Enix has learned some things since their last Mana remake. **— BRETT**



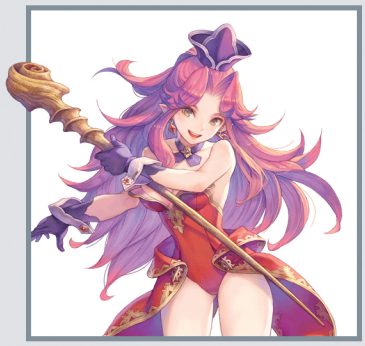
SEEKING VENGEANCE

DURAN

A sellsword from Vasena, Duran is loyal to King Richard. The Crimson Wizard — one of the primary villains in the game — invades his kingdom and ravages it. Defeated, Duran vows revenge, and aims to become the world's best swordsman to achieve it.

Duran is sort of the face of Trials of Mana, often representing the game in art, and he's an obvious choice to be your primary hero, especially since the Sword of Mana is so important throughout the series. Both he and Angela share the Dragon Emperor as their villain. He may not rack up combos like other characters, and he's a slower fighter on the battlefield, but he can enhance himself with elemental magic or become a healer.

Duran starts as a simple Fighter but later graduates to either Knight or Gladiator. If he chooses the light side, he can either be a Paladin or Liege. If dark is chosen, he will be an Edelfrei (Swordmaster) or Duelist.

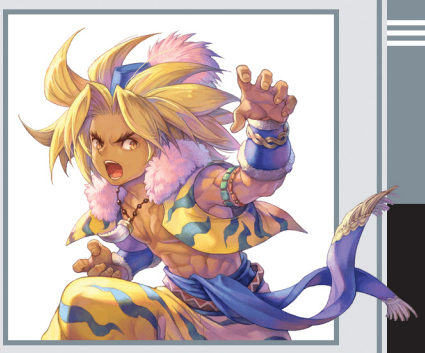


MAGICAL PRINCESS #1

ANGELA

Angela is the princess of Altena and daughter of Valda, the Queen of Reason. Altena is covered in snow and ice, but the citadel is kept as warm as a Spring day by Valda's magic. When that magic fades because of Mana leaving the world, Valda begins a campaign to regain her power through force. When Angela learns her mother's full plan, she accidentally teleports herself far away, but remains hopeful she will be welcomed back.

Angela shares her mother's penchant for magic, quickly becoming a powerful mage. Ice, fire, thunder and wind magic are available right away and can easily turn the tide of a battle, and she also has weak light and dark magic. Eventually her classes split between light and dark. On the light side she becomes a Sorceress and then either an Archmage or Grand Diviner. On the dark side she becomes a Mysticist, then Rune Seer or Magus.



AN ANIMAL OF A MAN

KEVIN

Prince Kevin of Ferolia is a beastman who speaks in broken English and is generally seen as more brawn than brains. His father, King Gauser, is also a beastman — but his mother is a human, making Kevin an outcast, as he's essentially a werewolf. Karl, a wolf pup, is his only true friend.

When Goremand tempts Gauser with the power to avenge the oppression he's suffered at the hands of humans, he turns Karl against Kevin to demonstrate his power. Kevin kills Karl in self defense. Gauser then makes plans to move against the city of Wendel, and Kevin sets out to defy him and see if he can revive Karl.

Playing as Kevin demands you pay attention to the diurnal properties of the game, as he's stronger as a werewolf at night. He begins as a Grappler, then shifts to either a Monk or Brawler. His light path makes him a Divine Fist or Warrior Monk, while his dark path leads to Enlightened or Fatal Fist.

THE HAPPY HEALER

CHARLOTTE

All of the other characters' first stop is Wendel to see the Priest of Light — but he's Charlotte's grandfather! She's the child of a human and an elf (despite such relationships being forbidden). Heath, a cleric, cares for Charlotte, as her grandfather is often busy. Heath is sent by the Priest to Jadd to investigate evil and is kidnapped as a result. Charlotte attempts to help and confronts Goremand, but Heath is taken.

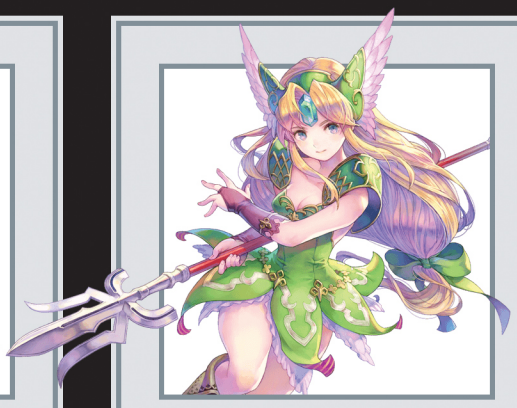
The game really hammers home that Charlotte's a child with her speech impediment and her weak stats. She begins as a Cleric and has access to healing spells early, and then she can become a Priestess or Enchantress. Following the light road she can transition to a High Cleric or a Sage, while succumbing to the dark will lead her to become a Necromancer or Warlock. The light side allows adding elemental magic to weapons, while her dark path summons monsters which will join you in battle.

FALSELY ACCUSED

HAWKEYE

Hawkeye is a stereotypical cocky thief with good intentions. Flamekhan is his leader and they reside in the sandy fortress of Nevarl. A witch named Isabella makes Flamekhan her puppet, and he begins invading surrounding areas to build a kingdom. Hawkeye talks with Flamekhan's children Eagle and Jessica about confronting Flamekhan, and soon learns of Isabella's plan. The witch turns Eagle on Hawkeye, and while Isabella ends up killing Eagle, Hawkeye is blamed. Jessica is fitted with a necklace that will kill her if the truth gets out or if Isabella is killed, while Hawkeye must escape wrongful incarceration.

Through class change, Hawkeye can either become a Ranger or Ninja. Following the light side makes him a Nomad or Rogue, while choosing the dark makes him a Ninja Master or Nightblade. His techniques use various traps or status effects to harm and distract enemies, but are fairly weak.



MAGICAL PRINCESS #2

RIESZ

Riesz is a princess like Angela, but she's also captain of Laurent's army where she hails from. Her brother Elliot is tricked into ceasing the wind that keeps enemies at bay, allowing Nervarl to attack Laurent, kill its king and take over. Riesz's father is killed and her brother kidnapped during the battle. Her quest involves picking up the pieces and seeking revenge, eventually leading her to face the Dark Prince.

She's an amazing fighter, showing why she rose to the status of captain. Her starting class is Amazon, which changes to either Valkyrie or Rune Maiden. By following light she can become a Vanadis or Starlancer whose magic can raise the stats of allies, whereas choosing dark will lead her to Fenrir Knight or Dragon Master and the magical ability to diminish enemy stats. Each of her final classes can summon a different creature that causes damage and inflicts status ailments!

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: RESCUE TEAM DX

Instead of having a cute little creature partner, you transform into a Pokémon yourself!

ALTHOUGH MANY VIEWERS of January's Pokémon Direct were hoping for a reveal of the long-rumored remake of Pokémon Diamond & Pearl, those looking for a different dose of Pokémon nostalgia won't have long to wait. The first surprise came when a snippet of pixelated action from the original Pokémon Mystery Dungeon games started to play on-screen, labeled with the year 2006 . . . and as the years counted upward, the scene continued, with a complete change in art style from pixels to 3D rendered colored pencil-style drawings! The first Nintendo Switch Pokémon Mystery Dungeon title and the first in the series in almost five years, Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX will be released on the Switch on March 6.

FROM TORNEKO TO TORCHIC

The Mystery Dungeon series is the brainchild of developer Spike Chunsoft, one of the developers of the original Dragon Quest games for the Famicom. They are heavily influenced by Western roguelike RPGs, specifically the aptly titled Rogue. In 1993, Spike Chunsoft (then merely known as Chunsoft) released the first game in the franchise, Torneko's Great Adventure, which starred the merchant Torneko from Dragon Quest IV. Since then, the Mystery Dungeon franchise has grown to encompass original titles (the Shiren the Wanderer games) as well as more titles developed for other franchises, like Chocobo's Mystery Dungeon: Every Buddy! and Etrian Mystery Dungeon.

However, the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon games have been the most successful of the franchise. Rescue Team DX is a ground-up remake of the first two games, Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team for the Game Boy Advance and Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team for the Nintendo DS, which were both originally released in 2006.

A SUDDEN SHAPESHIFT

Rescue Team DX opens with the selection of your personal Pokémon persona, as in this series, you aren't a human Trainer — instead, you're a human who's been somehow magically transformed into a Pokémon! Your choices include the first three generations of starters, as well as Pikachu, Eevee, Meowth, Skitty, Cubone, Machop and Psyduck. You also get to pick a partner to adventure alongside!

With your choices made, you're awakened by your partner in the middle of a forest, with only the memory of having once been human! The world is being wracked by natural disasters — which have only seemed to increase as of late — and your new pal's dream is to form an official Rescue Team to save the Pokémon affected by these disasters. Almost as soon as you and your partner get acquainted, you get your first official mission: a baby Caterpie has fallen down a ravine, and now it's up to you to save them! As an official Rescue Team, you'll receive missions from the Pelipper Post Office, with goals ranging from plain old exploration to search and rescue to escort missions.

Work your way up the Rescue Team ranks, and maybe one day you'll be as legendary as Alakazam, Charizard and Tyranitar of Team A.C.T. — or even Lucario! However, with all the chaos going around in the world, there's also rumors of a curse involving a human who was turned into a Pokémon . . .

WANDERING THE DUNGEON

The hallmarks of Mystery Dungeon games are their procedurally generated maps and turn-based movement. As you move throughout a floor in a Mystery Dungeon, your map — a transparent diagram superimposed over the screen — fills itself in, with icons denoting friends, foes, treasures and traps. New to Rescue Team DX is an Auto Explore mode, which you can toggle using the L Button and which lasts until you encounter a foe.

Much like the core Pokémon games, you have a set of four moves, which are learned though leveling up or can be taught using found or purchased TMs. They have the same elemental strengths and weaknesses, and an A Button press will now select the best move to use against your current target.

You also have the ability to throw items as well, and recovery and stat-boosting items have been supplemented by Seeds, which can also have other unique effects. One example is the Empowering Seed, which gives a Pokémon the ability to Mega Evolve. Evolution is usually unlocked in this series after completing the main story, however, so whether that's also going to be the case for Mega Evolution is unknown at this time.

Another somewhat inconvenient system you'll need to contend with is Hunger, which can be sated with apples or seeds before it negatively affects your health. Unfortunately, the original penalty for fainting in a dungeon — losing all your money and part of your inventory — is still in play, despite being lessened in later games. So proceed with caution!

TRY IT FOR FREE

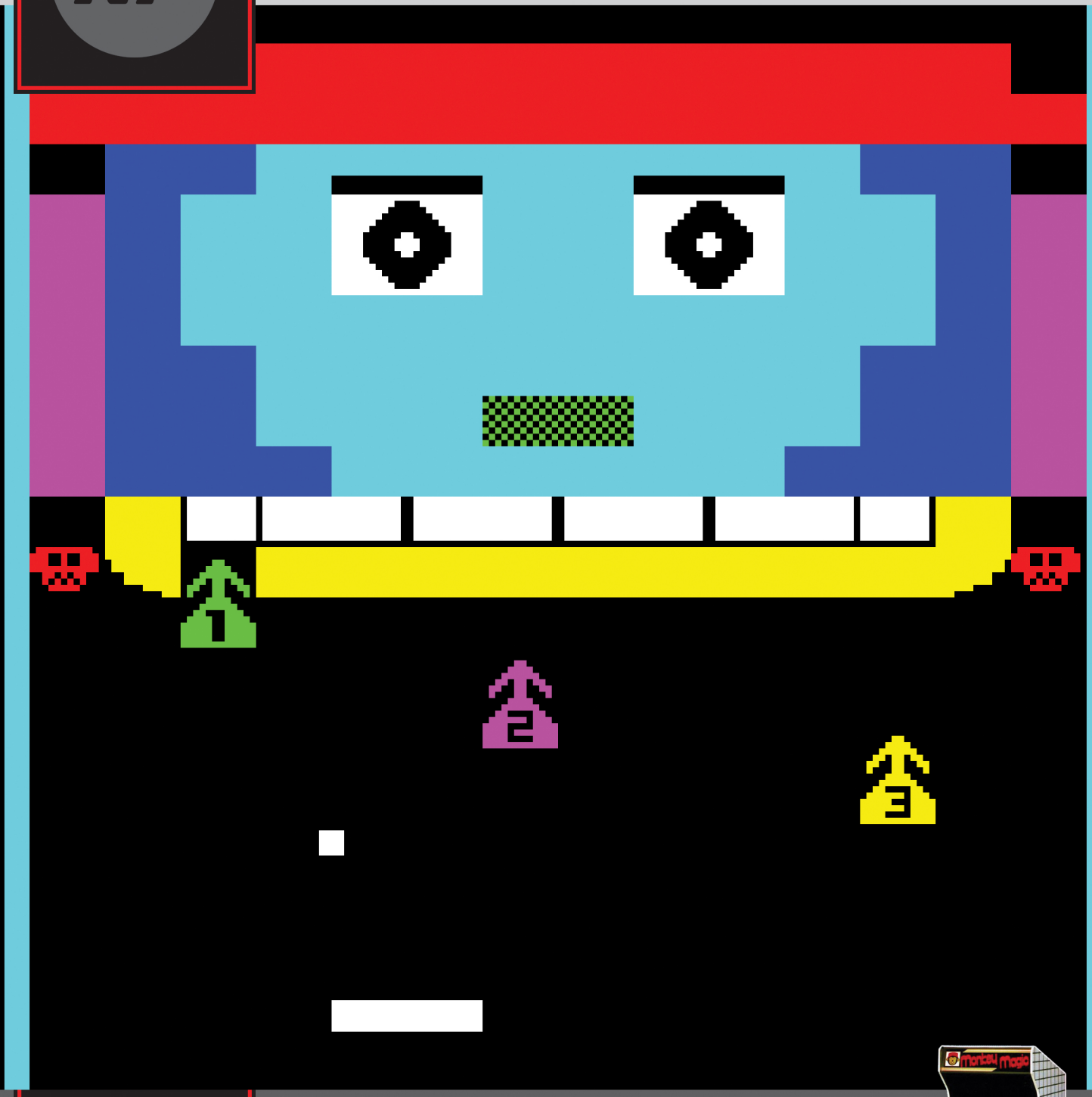
A free demo is available in the Switch eShop that lets you play the first three missions, and you'll be able to transfer your progress into the full game once it releases. So get ready to pack your bags, get your team assembled and set forth for adventure! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY
DEVELOPER: SPIKE CHUNSOFT
RELEASE: MARCH 6, 2020 RATING: E

THE ORIGINAL RELEASES

Seeing a new Pokémon game hit store shelves with two different versions is nothing surprising, but there was a bit of shock when the first Rescue Team adventures arrived back in '06 — because it was the first (and still only) time the two game versions were made for two different platforms! If you were still gaming on your Game Boy Advance, Nintendo presented Red Rescue Team. For those who had moved on to the Nintendo DS, though, the Blue version was ready on the same day too! The only major difference between the two, gameplay-wise, was that the DS touchscreen was an input option for Blue. If you'd like to try them out yourself and do a direct comparison, both are still on sale in the Wii U eShop for $7.99 (Red) or $9.99 (Blue). See where it all started!

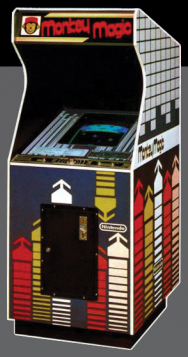
BY JONATHAN HOLMES



NINTENDO'S ORIGINAL ANIMAL STAR

MONKEY MAGIC
ARCADE, 1979
(ONLY IN JAPAN)

Nintendo's been in the monkey business since the beginning . . . and I'm not talking about Donkey Kong! Two years before that iconic ape appeared in arcades, the Big N presented a different simian star as the face of an earlier coin-op cabinet. Literally the face! Monkey Magic was a Breakout clone in which the rows of colorful bricks at the top of the screen were swapped out for a massive monkey mug instead. You'd first pierce through his chin with one of three arrow-topped targets, then take out all his teeth, then bruise up every block on his face before finally demolishing his hat one rectangular piece at a time. Monkey Magic was produced in very limited numbers and never released outside of Japan, nor has it ever been reissued in any more modern form. Perhaps one day we'll get to officially meet this monkey! — **LUCAS**



FROM ANIMAL TO MAN . . . AND EVERY STEP IN-BETWEEN!

Exploring 10 stages of sentience in video games.

NINTENDO HAS A long history of plopping players in a place that's crawling with animals, but compared to their competition, they are not as quick to give beasts top billing. In fact, looking over the company's entire history of animal characters reveals two overlapping patterns.

The first is they rarely make games where the player stars as a real-life animal. In fact, most of their most famous wildlife heroes have had most of their titles developed by second or third parties. Rare's (and later Retro's) work on the Donkey Kong Country series and Argonaut's (then Namco, then Platinum's) Star Fox projects are just a few examples. As for Mario, Link and Samus, they all have their own connections to magical or alien wildlife of one kind or another, but they're all unmistakably human.

That brings us to Nintendo's second animal habit. When they put some form of fauna in a starring role, it's almost always a species that doesn't actually exist. There's Splatoon's Inklings, Yoshi, Detective Pikachu . . . and that's just the big names. Compared to rivals like Sega and their hedgehog hero, and Sony's long list of cats, bandicoots, apes and dogs that have at one time or another been crowned with the title of PlayStation brand mascot, Nintendo seems downright shy about putting real-life animals in the spotlight.

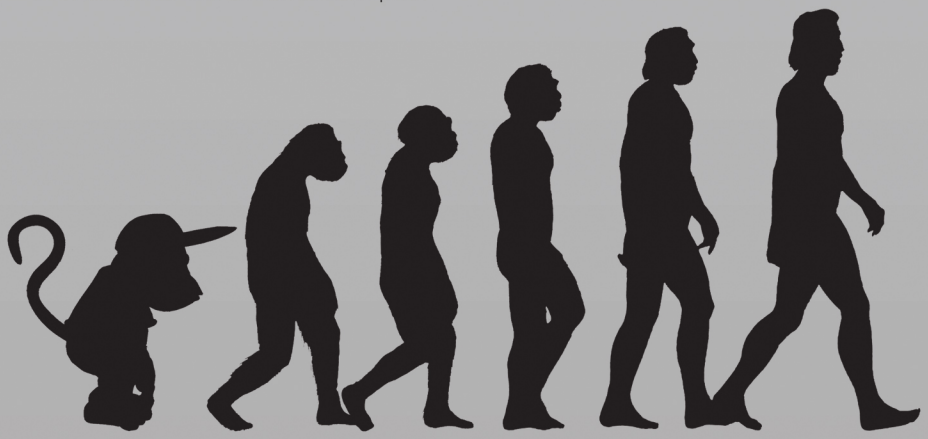
Taking note of this got me thinking: What is Nintendo's real philosophy toward putting animals in games? The answer, from what I can tell, is that they always want to do a little bit of everything. Just as Mickey Mouse has a pet dog named Pluto — and a best friend named Goofy who is *also* a dog — Nintendo employs some beasts that don't have an ounce of humanity, and others who are just one degree of separation from being regular people. Most of their stockpile of furry or four-legged friends lie somewhere in-between these two poles.

To better examine the company's great variance in how realistic or anthropomorphized Nintendo's animal leads are, we devised this scale for your consideration.

Before jumping into the rankings themselves, you should know a little bit about what criteria we drew upon in their development. For starters, we didn't allow any mythical or made-up creatures on this list. That was painful for me, as I desperately wanted to use this feature as an excuse to gush about Cubivore, the glorious GameCube title that predated Minecraft for the title of best boxy, open-world hunting and gathering game. I guess that rant will just have to wait. That also meant that other favorites, like the previously name-dropped Yoshi and Pikachu, couldn't make the cut. We also didn't allow side characters in, as the focus here is to analyze Nintendo's strategy toward putting animals in the spotlight. Sorry, Rambi.

You should also know a little about how we defined what makes an animal character more like a human and vice versa. We looked at three general domains: appearance, behaviors and motivations. For example, if we were to take the crustacean combatants from Fight Crab — the upcoming Switch eShop title I wrote about earlier in this issue — and rank them on our scale, they would likely score a 9 out of 10. That's because they look and act exactly like real crabs, but are motivated to fight each other with lightsabers and battle axes in a way that ever-so-slightly resembles nonsensical, purposeless competitive violence that only humans seem to crave.

With all that said, I think you're finally ready . . . let's dive in! **— JONATHAN**



NINTENDOG

FOR YEARS, NINTENDO dodged the industry-wide push toward stories about real people doing horrible things. While the rest of the gaming world was going gaga over Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty, they were doling out decidedly silly classics like Pikmin 2 and Luigi's Mansion.

Then, in 2005, Nintendo finally embraced realism with Nintendogs, a game of puppy rearing. It sold 20,000,000 copies — and rightfully so! The game's AI, touch controls and animations are impressive by any standard. In unison, they invoke a level of emotional believability that even today's AAA titles can't quite achieve, making the Nintendog one of the most convincing virtual actors in the history of gaming.

Nintendogs get fleas, learn tricks from voice commands if you give them treats, need frequent walks and even pee and poop right in front of you (though the exact colors and shapes of the substances they excrete were changed in the name of good taste). Other than little details like that, these pups are the dog-gone genuine article — and you won't find any more accurate animals in Nintendo's back catalog.

10

DUCK HUNT DUO

AS IN NINTENDOGS, you play as yourself in Duck Hunt, interacting with animals that live in another reality on the other side of the video screen. The difference is, instead of nurturing these creatures, you blast them with a laser gun! That's probably why it's for the best that the Duck Hunt Duo (both the dog and duck) aren't depicted realistically.

They both bear a closer resemblance to a Pluto and Plucky than any actual flesh-and-blood wildlife. They act more or less like their real-life namesakes though – the dog sniffing out avian victims for you to blast with your trusty Zapper, the ducks fleeing desperately from gunshots as though their 8-bit lives depended on it. The realism remains intact for most of a Duck Hunt game's proceedings.

But, ultimately, the dog can't help but break character, laughing a very cruel giggle should you fail to fell any waterfowl. It's an awfully insulting move – one that could only come from a sadistic human mind. It's also the performance that made him an icon.

9

DONKEY & DIDDY KONG

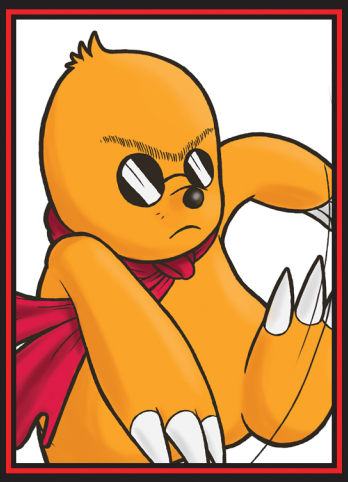
THE KONGS HAVE been around since Nintendo's earliest days in video games, which has given them time to go through plenty of evolutions of their own.

In his original form, Donkey might have scored a 9 or a 10 on this scale – but as of today, he's at least an 8. He's still very much a gorilla, beating his chest, hoarding bananas and ook-ooking through life just like the real thing. The only exception is that tie, which ever-so-slightly hints at aspirations toward Homo sapien status.

Diddy takes these ambitions a step further with both a hat *and* a shirt. Throw some jeans on him and he could be a veritable simian Ness cosplayer!

Other Kongs, like the somewhat scandalous Candy and the fun-loving Funky, go further still with human-style headwear, shirts and shorts. Still, the whole bunch rarely make an effort to live like people (Donkey's Bluto-like preoccupation with Pauline excluded), leaving these primates permanently stuck in an awkward, one-quarter step toward humanity.

8



MUDDY MOLE

AT FIRST GLANCE, Muddy Mole – the star of 1997's unfortunately overlooked Game Boy puzzler Mole Mania – may not seem much more human than the Kongs. Another creation of Shigeru Miyamoto, he looks like nothing more than a regular cartoon rodent with sunglasses, a scarf and a unibrow he might want to take some time to tweeze. The difference with Muddy comes down to motivations.

While Donkey and his bunch are largely driven by primal instinct, Muddy is more methodical. Put in a place of grave crisis, he painstakingly plots a plan to rescue his family from an unscrupulous rancher. He can even read the note, written in English, that this foul farmer leaves behind to taunt him after he makes off with his wife and children. A run-of-the-mill mole would probably mourn the loss of its brood for a fraction of a second before returning to a life of underground naps and snacking on grubs. But not Muddy! In the face of great hardship, he's willing to risk it all for love – and a better future for subterranean rodents everywhere.

7

ARTWORK BY MARK KELLY

DILLON

THE SUPERSTAR OF the 3DS eShop thanks to his starring role as the rolled-up hero of the Dillon's Rolling Western series, this cowboy has even managed to cross over into the Super Smash Bros. series as an Assist Trophy. Some say he has Goron blood running through his veins, but regardless of his ancestry, this silent protagonist is one of the last surviving rangers in the zoological version of the American Old West that he calls home.

But why did it take him so long to get dressed? Compared to his compadres (a squid, a lizard and a squirrel in a miniature helicopter, to name a few), he used to spend a lot of time in the buff, wearing not much more than a belt, hat and boots in his first two games. Maybe remaining scantily clad helped him tap into his unique armadillo abilities? It's hard to say, because he never speaks.

But one thing is clear: This armored rodent goes above and beyond in more ways than one. Mix his super-charged rolling and ram attacks with a sense of protective civic duty to his fellow manimals, and you have a hero who's almost halfway to humanity.

6

TOM NOOK

ANIMAL CROSSING'S ICONIC tanooki has his feet planted in two worlds.

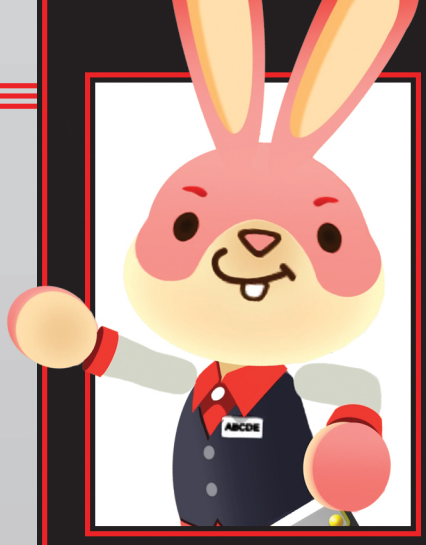
He starts off wearing nothing but an apron, living in the woods, reveling in his hunting and gathering instincts. That natural life is where his first foot is planted.

The other is on the neck of the player, an innocent child known only as "The Villager." First he crushes them with astounding levels of debt, then hits them with a horrid, low-wage job, then knocks them flat by laying them off, leaving them with no concrete way to make ends meet any more.

That's just the start of Tom's wild ride to the economic 1%, eventually leading him to shed his apron for a high-class three-piece suit. These are just a few of the ways that Nook has come to symbolize a particular kind of cold, corporate evil. It's the kind of callous capitalism that starts with a primal urge to dominate and control others, then expands on a broad scale through the use of uniquely human tools like money, mortgages and profoundly useless displays of wealth.

. . . At least he seems to be mellowing out a bit in New Horizons?

5



ARCADE BUNNY

THIS LITTLE RABBIT works as a gatekeeper to a shopping experience packed to the gills with massive crane games.

Like Tom Nook, he doesn't start off wearing pants – though he's much more personable than his furry cousin in customer service. Maybe that's because unlike Nook, Arcade Bunny is capable of taking your real-life money from you! He knows he won't win you over if he comes off like a money-grubber, always deferring responsibility for business matters to his mysterious boss. Like most of us, he's just another cog in the wheelworks of commerce, doing his best to do right by his employer and his customers alike.

While real-life rabbits are also very pleasant, their little brains just aren't capable of the same level of social intelligence that Arcade Bunny shows on a regular basis. His comedic timing, his anxious ramblings and his tendency to hand out daily Free Plays all speak to his place on a higher plane of moral development. Thus, he comes closer to the human standard.

4

FOX McCLOUD

IT'S ABOUT TIME you showed up, Fox!

When it comes to leading men who are not men, Fox is probably Nintendo's biggest name. In fact, I doubt that sci-fi movie stars like Rocket Raccoon from the Guardians of the Galaxy would have become household names if Mr. McCloud hadn't led the way!

Like Rocket, Fox functions pretty much like any would-be Han Solo. He flies a ship, protects his friends, battles the intergalactic forces of evil and even receives a hefty cash reward at the end of some of his stories.

Unlike Rocket, he almost always wears pants, which makes him even more civilized than the Marvel megastar.

That said, there's no denying that Fox still has the head of an animal on his shoulders, both literally and figuratively. He thinks like a man, flies like a maverick and is crazy like a fox. When it comes to fuzzy-faced hotshots who meld high-flying outer space action with accessible, teddy bear adorableness, he's both the first and the best.

3

RUSTY SLUGGER

THIS PITIABLE, 56-YEAR-OLD American dog-man — and his Japanese counterpart, an even stranger mutt named Inuji Darumeshi — probably wish they were *less* human.

Like many guys their age, they're both balding with combovers — and have nose hairs so overgrown that they're willing to give you real-cash discounts at their game shop should you assist with a trim.

They're also pretty depressed. Their careers as pro baseball players are long over, and worse still, their wives have left them to take care of a house full of mischievous kids all on their own. These are not the kinds of problems most dogs ever face.

Though Rusty and Inuji share some canine traits — like floppy ears and fuzzy muzzles — in every other way, they are basically sad, middle-aged divorcees who are desperate to make ends meet by selling eShop baseball games. Perhaps Nintendo perceived that painting these pooches as pathetic papas would lead players to purchase their products with less prompting.

2

BARBARA THE BAT

FINALLY, WE REACH the star of Jam with the Band, the cult classic Nintendo DS music game series that lets you rock out to pre-recorded tunes with a variety of different instruments, or compose your own songs for others to download and play. (Unfortunately, it never actually launched in America!)

Barbara is the frontwoman for the gig, and a devilish diva in her own right. Based on her name and strange headgear, you might also guess she's some form of winged rodent. Sadly (at least for some), that's not really the case. Sometimes she looks to have a wet, black nose and some mildly vampiric fangs, but I'm guessing those are just cosmetic accessories. In more recent appearances in Smash Bros. Ultimate, Mario Maker on Wii U and Master of Illusion on DS, her schnoz looks almost 100% human, as does the rest of her, um, "anatomy."

And that's the list! Ranging from the most dog-like little digital pups possible all the way to a real girl who's only pretending to be a bat as part of her stage persona, the Big N's animal stars run the gamut!

1

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

IT WAS BULLS vs. Hornets on the cover of the 70th issue of Nintendo Power, and inside the pages of the magazine, some things had changed.

For starters, the Top 20 was moved up to the front of the magazine, just after Player's Pulse. The King of Kong continued dominating the charts with Donkey Kong Country, though we could no longer tell by how much, as Final Fantasy III (a.k.a. VI), Super Metroid and Mega Man X were all right behind. DK also delivered a domination sandwich to the Game Boy charts, with Donkey Kong '94 and Donkey Kong Land placing on either side of Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins in the Top 3, while Final Fantasy III held the top spot in the Top 10 Epics. DKC also topped the Most Wanted list, and Metroid, Dr. Mario and Dragon Warrior (a.k.a. Quest) earned their way into the Hall of Fame.

A whopping 16 pages of cover star NBA Jam: Tournament Edition headlined Super NES coverage, and was joined by Metal Warriors (which shared poster duty with Star Trek: Deep Space Nine), would-be Sonic rival Speedy Gonzales: Los Gatos Bandidos, a one-two puzzle punch of 16-bit Tetris & Dr. Mario, super cyborg ninja action from Hudson in Hagane, The Incredible Hulk ('nuff said) and Bubsy II. Meanwhile, Take 2 coverage included The Ignition Factor, Top Gear 3000, Jurassic Park Part 2: The Chaos Continues, Looney Tunes B-Ball and Ardy Lightfoot.

Coverage of the annual Winter Consumer Electronics Show (CES) saw Donkey Kong Country and Land take center stage, along with Secret of Evermore, WeaponLord, Virtual Boy and Star Fox 2. Along with a list of joke rumors, NP's writers also made sure to hype the upcoming Nintendo Ultra 64 — while taking shots at its competitors and down-playing their graphical capabilities and CD-ROM technology. Ha, compact discs! Am I right?

A new ongoing feature made its debut: Epic Center, "The New Source for Adventure Gamers," which also included role-playing games. In addition to a small calendar of upcoming SquareSoft releases, the first Epic Center also looked at the making of Enix's King Arthur and the Knights of Justice, based on an early-'90s cartoon show. Six pages of tabloid-styled coverage introduced us to EarthBound, and "Epic Strategies" offered tips to help you venture forth into Final Fantasy III, Uncharted Waters: New Horizons, Breath of Fire and Might & Magic III: Isles of Terra.

Did you ever wonder just what makes Nintendo's Game Counselors tick? A four-page feature answered what happens "When You Make the Call," from how the Voice Response Unit (VRU) worked to just what ELMO does (it's more than being tickled). Some neat stats also revealed that between October 1985 and March 1995, the company received 44,155,050 consumer contacts, with the Game Play Counseling and Consumer Service departments receiving 42,673,210 of those, and the remaining 1,481,840 being through correspondence. Nearly all in an age before email!

This month's Player's Poll was the annual NP Awards, and a lot of heavy hitters were nominated for rewards, from Donkey Kong Country to Super Metroid, Earthworm Jim and Final Fantasy III, among others for the Super NES. For the Game Boy, Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3, Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Land and Mega Man V got frequent nominations. The Player's Poll participants who won the grand prize would receive 25 games and 25 Super Power Stamps to put toward the purchase of Super Power Supplies.

Pak Watch closed the issue out with looks at True

FOUR COURAGEOUS KIDS FACE ULTIMATE TEST

TEEN HEROES DEFY GALACTIC FIEND

EPIC PREVIEW

PSYCHIC YOUTH

TELEPATHY LINKED TO TEEN HERO

NESS'S FAMILY

MORE AMAZING POWERS

NESS TO SAVE EARTH

MECHANICAL GENIUS JOINS NESS'S TEAM

A BOY NAMED PU

SAMARITANS HELP SAVE PLANET

PSI BOY

APPLE KID

THE RUNAWAY BROS.

Brain evolution leads to breakthrough in PSI power.

40 NINTENDO POWER

ISSUE #70: MARCH 1995

ISSUE #71: APRIL 1995

Lies, WeaponLord, Kirby's Dream Land 2 and a bit of buzz about a Donkey Kong Country sequel starring Diddy Kong!

The jackal-headed Anubis took the cover of NP #71 to herald the arrival of Stargate, which received 10 pages of coverage, including one side of a poster for WeaponLord. It was joined on Super NES by eight pages of Spider-Man (based on the Fox Kids cartoon of the time), four pages of NBA Jam: Tournament Edition codes and some Addams Family Values. Take 2 reviews also provided some coverage for Bonkers, Air Cavalry, Drop Zone, Pac in Time and Bust-a-Move.

But don't think Nintendo had forgotten about the Game Boy! Mario's Picross took center stage for the handheld, alongside The Lion King and a Take 2 review of Jurassic Park Part 2: The Chaos Continues.

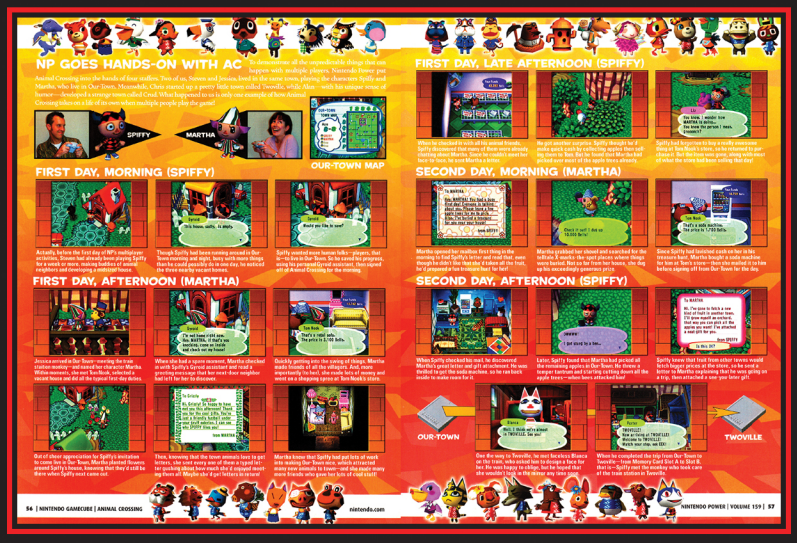
It was an all-Nintendo month for the top three slots of the SNES Top 20, with DKC, The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past and Super Metroid sitting atop the charts. The Game Boy charts echoed the previous month, but with a surprise second place no one ever saw coming: The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past! (They probably meant Link's Awakening, in all fairness.) The Top 10 of the month was Fighting Games, and Mortal Kombat II reigned supreme above Super Punch-Out!!, Super Street Fighter II and WWF Raw — and surprisingly, Mortal Kombat II's Game Boy counterpart. Everyone still wanted DKC, and the latest entries into the Hall of Fame were Final Fantasy, Kirby's Dream Land and Baseball Stars.

Epic Center had a sidebar of "Epic Games (not the Fortnite guys) That You Don't Want to Miss," along with a review of Ogre Battle, behind the scenes of Secret of Evermore and Epic Strategies for Brandish. As if to provide balance to the whole "jocks versus nerds" rivalry, it was immediately followed by a new edition of The Sports Scene, with looks at Superstar Soccer, Sterling Sharpe's End 2 End, Madden '95, Super Bases Loaded 3, Super Baseball Simulator 1000 2, The Sporting News Power Baseball and NCAA Final Four Basketball.

Then it was time for more Ultra 64, as Nintendo introduced the Dream Team — an "exclusive club" of specially selected companies chosen to develop for the upcoming 64-bit machine. Making the team were Acclaim, Alias, Angel Studios, DMA, GameTek, Multigen, Paradigm, Rambus, Rare, Sierra Online, Silicon Graphics, Software Creations, Spectrum Holobyte and Williams. Suffice to say, results varied wildly, but despite missing such names as Capcom and Konami (who would develop for the machine eventually), a deeper look at the histories of the names involved makes it clear why Nintendo would want them.

A special promotion allowed Power Players to earn Banana Bucks by purchasing selected Nintendo hardware and Donkey Kong games, which could then be redeemed for Donkey Kong Country merchandise from the Super Power Supplies catalog. Elsewhere, you can tell we're smack dab in the middle of the '90s as the prize for the Player's Poll contest was to "go cyber with Nintendo Power" with an AST Pentium PC with fax/modem and a year of America Online!

Finally, Pak Watch took us home with a look at the upcoming Boogerman, Jungle Strike, Timecop, X-Band, Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings and a wave of Super NES games from future Superman 64 developer Titus. There were also two pages of exclusive behind the scenes coverage of GoldenEye . . . for the SNES? The focus here was on the movie, but it's clear Rare's interest was there from early on! — **DAVID**



WARPING FORWARD TO 2002 . . . AND BEYOND!

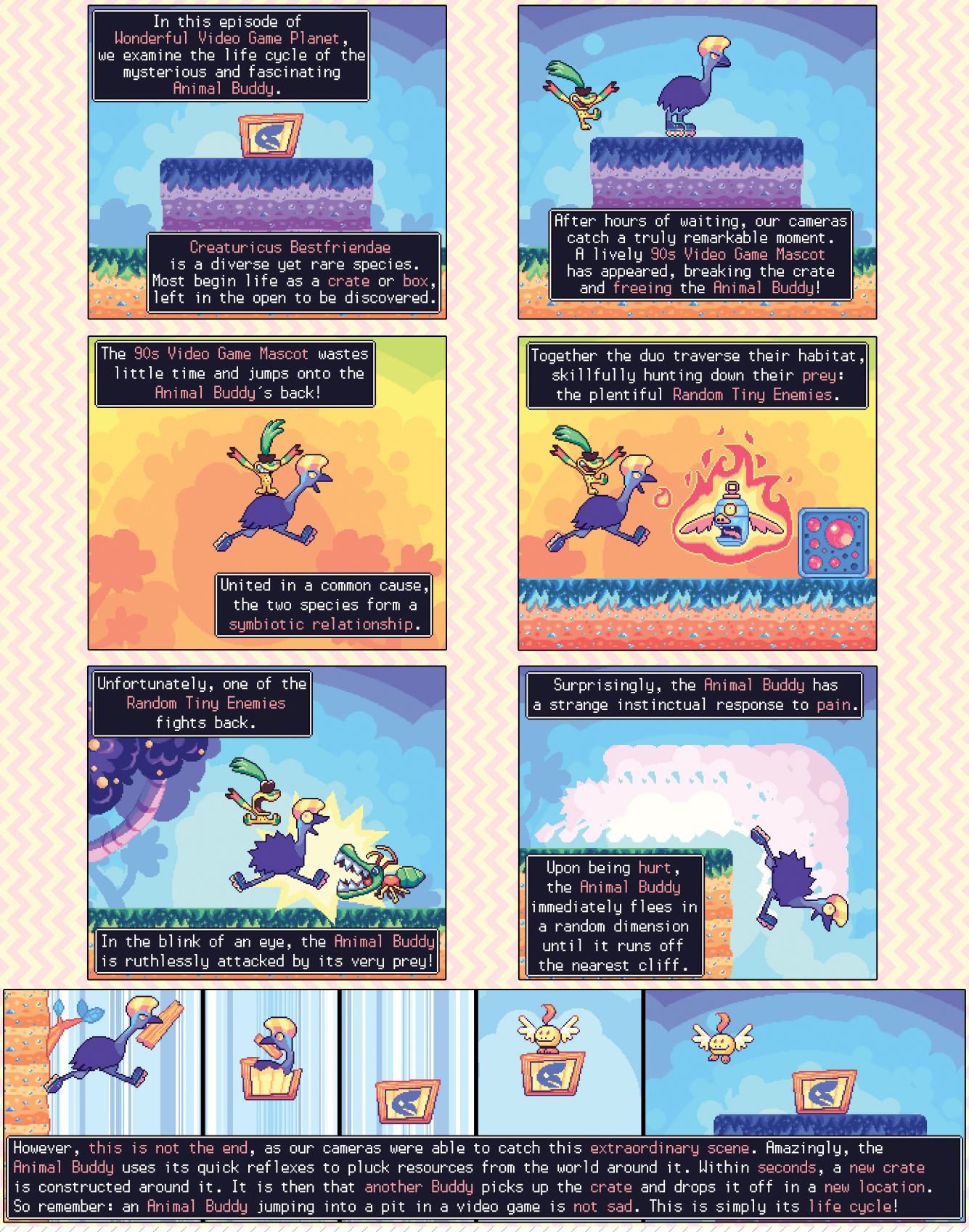
NP'S ANIMAL CROSSING COVERAGE

In honor of the arrival of Animal Crossing: New Horizons and the first appearance of the Animal Crossing series on the cover of NF, we wanted to fast-forward our Warp Zone series just a bit to be able to highlight Animal Crossing's first appearance on the front of Nintendo Power . . . unfortunately, the GameCube original never earned that honor. Nor did Animal Crossing: Wild World for the DS! Both of them got their own standalone Player's Guides penned by the NP staff, but neither got to headline the magazine proper. Ultimately that honor fell to Animal Crossing: City Folk for the Wii, years later in December 2008! And since NP got unplugged before New Leaf came around on the 3DS, the City Folk cover seen below is the only AC NP. Of course, we can't very well look down on our predecessors for poor judgment, since we also waited until this very issue to put an Animal Crossing game front-and-center for Nintendo Force! At least NP's interior pages did Animal Crossing proud, as NP writers chronicled their personal experiences playing in the original to hype up the series debut, and months after it proved to be a huge GameCube hit, NP introduced a regular monthly feature called The Crossing Guardian to alert readers to upcoming in-game events!

REST 0

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK



BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

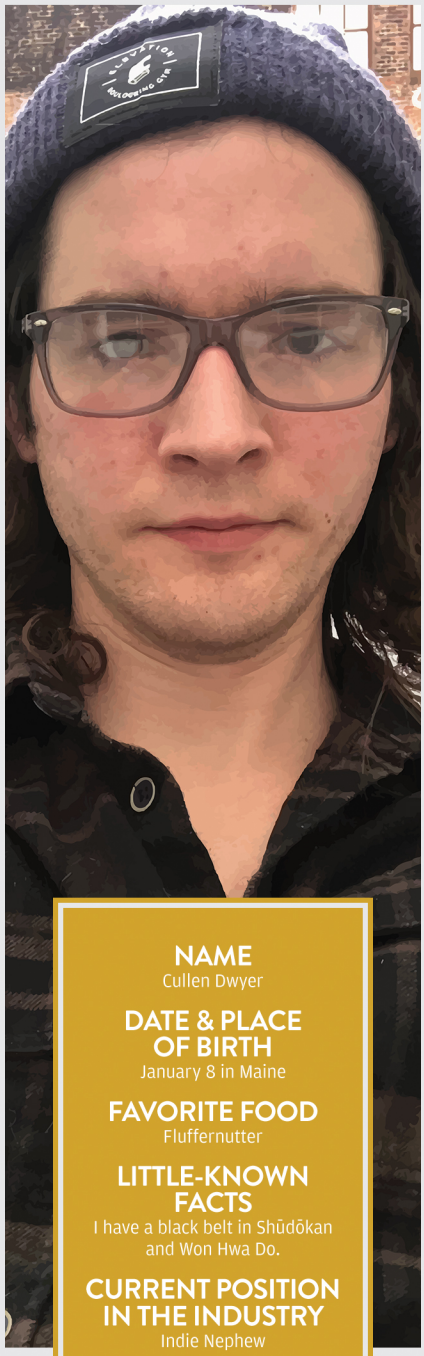
NAME
Britt Brady

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
January 6 in Illinois

FAVORITE FOOD
Korean BBQ

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I'm funny.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Indie Scum



NAME
Cullen Dwyer

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
January 8 in Maine

FAVORITE FOOD
Fluffernutter

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I have a black belt in Shūdōkan and Won Hwa Do.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Indie Nephew

NAME
Joseph Bourgeois

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
April 24 in Alaska

FAVORITE FOOD
Falafel

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I have a BA in music.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Indie Uncle

DOINKSOFT

A talk with the creative team behind the "Meowtroidvania" hit, Gato Roboto!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: Why did you get into game development?

CULLEN: I started with playing games on an NES emulator as a kid and wanted to make my own Zelda levels, and found some ROM hacking tools and went nuts. Then I Asked Jeeves "How to Be A Game Maker" and made my Mom buy me Game Maker 5 when I was in middle school. It was always a hobby of mine, and I didn't start doing it as a job until I met Britt six or so years ago.

BRITT: I guess my first introduction was in about 6th grade when my cousin introduced me to editing sprites in RPG Maker 95. I spent a couple years trying to start game projects with people online, but nothing ever happened and I never got any good. Once I started playing guitar, all my cool music friends made fun of me and I stopped making pixel art. I started getting interested again when I saw indie games coming back and a friend's brother needed sound effects and music for a game called Lightbound. After that I did every game jam I could.

JOSEPH: As a kid I was really into drawing and video games, and I spent a lot of my school hours absentmindedly drawing characters and levels on paper. I somehow got the idea that making games was an attainable goal, although I had no real knowledge of the process. When I discovered the Newgrounds Flash scene around 1999, I "procured" a copy of Flash 4 and went hog wild, creating a ton of little unfinished animations and games over the next few years. During college I opted to study music, and in a way I distracted myself from game making for a solid 10 years. I always wanted to return to games, and at some point decided that I wanted to be a video game composer. I found it difficult to find a development team/studio in need of a composer and said, "OK. I'll make the games myself. Then I'll make the music for my own games." So I spent a couple solid years focused on sharpening my game-making skills, and I can now happily say that I am a programmer. (And Britt makes all the music.)

There are schools with formal game development programs, but some of the most successful devs out there have no formal education or training for the job. How did you learn how to make games, and what are the things you look at when grading the quality of your own work?

CULLEN: I am completely self-taught. I actually dropped out of high school my senior year. All of the information you need to learn how to make games is available online, and there are a lot of great communities and forums that can help people get started. When grading the quality of my own work, I tend to ask myself, "Would I play this if I didn't make it?" It's easy to think your work is better than it is when you show your friends and they think it's cool *because* you made it, rather than thinking it's amazing that you made something cool.

BRITT: I actually signed up for the game development program at the community college and took a Game Maker class. I dropped out after that because I felt like I learned more from YouTube and that all the non-game-related classes I was required to take were distracting me from learning how to make games. I really dislike school and went to an alternative private school from 7th grade through high school, where I cheated my way through and barely showed up.

JOSEPH: My earliest attempts at game making were in high school, using Flash and Click & Create, and most of what I learned came from tutorial sites or the Newgrounds forum. I never took any programming classes, but a lot of subjects I studied in school ended up being useful, specifically Physics and Trigonometry. It's weird — I always held this belief that I didn't have the right kind of brain for programming, but once I started to improve my skills, I realized I had a bunch of useful knowledge hidden away, collecting dust. It felt really good to make use of that part of my brain again.

Some of the team at Doinksoft used to work at Nicalis, publisher of 1001 Spikes and The Binding of Isaac: Afterbirth. Then, like Yacht Club Games did when they set sail from WayForward, you broke off to do your own thing, gaining independence from the indie publisher you were working for. Did you ever pitch Gato Roboto internally when you were at Nicalis, or was it a project that you always knew you wanted to do on your own?

BRITT: Cullen and I were independent before being acquired by Nicalis. We spent a little over a year there and it wasn't at all what I expected it to be like. I never intended Gato to be a commercial game. It was gonna be a tiny, free itch.io game that Joseph and I were just making for fun. I actually made the prototype purely to practice programming when Cullen was out of town after we sold the company and before becoming employees at Nicalis. It was after I got terminated and my third child being born that same week that I was desperate to try and secure funding to support my family and I thought to continue with it as a commercial game. Gato was one of the only things I had.

Speaking of publishers, how's it been to work with Devolver Digital?

CULLEN: Working with Devolver has been the best experience of my career and maybe my life. They are wonderful people who really care about us, and they are totally not leaning over my shoulder telling me to write this.

BRITT: Really better than I could have ever expected. I constantly tell myself how lucky I am to be part of the Devolver fam. They invest in us more than our games, and seem to really care. They have an excellent brand, they are clever, they are some of the most genuine and caring people I've met and they function in a way that I can relate to. I hope I get to work with them for the rest of my career.

JOSEPH: The people at Devolver are the best. They treated us with respect and didn't get in the way of our creative process. They are super fun and have a sense of humor. I can't think of a better situation than working with Devolver.

You started developing Gato Roboto long before other two-to-three color games like Minit and Save Me Mr. Tako hit the market, and even longer before the announcement of the upcoming Playdate handheld console with its retro black-and-white display. Were you at all concerned about a glut of Game Boy-esque announcements stealing your

thunder, and has being a part of this trend hurt your game at all?
CULLEN: No, I think that being part of the trend has actually benefited us. It's great to be compared to other cool and interesting games like Minit and Downwell. Much like "It's Metroid but with a Cat", "It's like Blaster Master meets Minit" is nothing but useful and flattering.
BRITT: I think the Playdate looks sweet and when I saw its announcement tweet, I saw comments like "Is Gato Roboto going to be on it?". So I think it kinda helped. I think some people wished our game had color, but we added a lot of detail with sound, music, animation and gameplay in ways we might not have considered if the art were more vibrant. I think that this restriction led to a lot of creativity in other areas.

While we're on the topic of other games that relate to your work, I have to ask, is the frog enemy in Gato Roboto related to the frogs in Downwell? They look alike, they hop alike, at times they even croak alike . . .
BRITT: Describe a frog.
JOSEPH: Oh those frogs? Same frogs, yeah.
CULLEN: All frogs in all games exist in the same canonical universe, actually.

When I first saw Gato Roboto, I instantly thought, "I can't believe they made a full game out of Mewtroid, my favorite microgame from WarioWare: Twisted!" In fact, I actually screamed that sentence out loud. Is that what actually happened, or did you have other inspirations in mind at the point of Gato's conception?
JOSEPH: I first heard of Mewtroid in a Twitter comment, on an early GIF of Gato Roboto. At the time, the game was titled CATROID, and some people definitely considered this a reference to the WarioWare minigame. However, I don't think any of us were aware of Mewtroid until that point.
BRITT: I actually never played WarioWare. I just thought people on the Internet would like my tweets more if it was a cat.

Front-loading your game with a reference to a beloved franchise does a lot to heighten player expectations. How did you work to both meet and defy those expectations?
BRITT: I think the reference is attractive to a lot of fans of the franchise, and the cat brings in those who maybe never played. So just due to some of the novelty and wanting to make a game everyone could enjoy, we focused more on fun and accessibility than catering too hard to expectations.
JOSEPH: I think that the game's tone – more playful than that of the typical Metroid game – has helped counterbalance a lot of the big expectations that might come along with the Metroidvania categorization. However, we wanted to make sure that there was substance behind the charm, so for each element that was simplified, another was enhanced. As a result, we ended up with some interesting design complexities: entry-level accessibility/high skill ceiling, low-res visuals/high-res audio, a goofy self-aware storyline/serious emotional moments, etc.
CULLEN: When we were designing mechanics, we thought, "OK, so there's this obvious power-up, how can we twist it just a little?" The rockets don't have ammo, the dash is an instant dash, the double jump is a really weird half Screw Attack/half Sonic the Hedgehog jump. Same with level design. I played every 2D Metroid game before designing the first map. I wanted certain things to be homages (the intro map is very inspired by the intro map to Super Metroid), but at the same time utilize our mechanics and what makes our game different.

If you're going to make a game that doesn't rely on color-coding to help differentiate different areas and identify the difference between threats from harmless background elements, you have to think outside the box. I think you did an amazing job in overcoming those challenges with Gato, but were there ever times you wanted to break down and just add one more color in order to make your lives easier?
CULLEN: In early development, I was petitioning for at least one more color, for maybe water or lava or to make enemies pop out. After Miroko started working on enemy animations with us, I stopped worrying, because it just filled all the 1-bit art with the same life and energy that colors would have.
BRITT: For me, I wanted to stick to the black and white and I thought that sound and shapes could carry the atmosphere. Also going back to add more color to what I had already made sounded daunting.
JOSEPH: At one point, I thought it would be cool to have a special unlockable palette that drew all the sprites in ZX Spectrum colors or something, but it would have taken too much of our development time to implement, so it never happened.

The Metroid series is known for its secret endings and other hidden surprises. Can you give us a hint about any Easter eggs hiding in Gato?
CULLEN: Walls aren't always walls. Just because the cat had kittens in the oven don't make 'em biscuits.
BRITT: We show a lot on the map – but not everything.

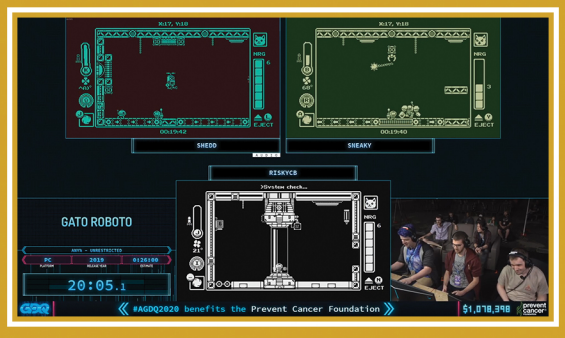
One of the great things about your game is Kiki's personality. She talks, thinks and acts just like a real cat, making her adventure as an unlikely mech pilot all the more endearing. What advice do you have for other developers who are thinking of making a game about animals and are looking to set the right tone between authentic and fantastic?
CULLEN: If your animal mascot is supposed to be an actual animal, set rules and follow them. Our rule for Kiki is that she is just a regular cat, not a supernatural one, and that means that she can never talk, she only meows. You can't really tell if she cares about the story. You never see an italicized thought in her head. Instead we let all of the other NPCs do the talking. They have goals and and desires; she is laissez-faire and clueless.
BRITT: I thought it was the perfect setup for a silent protagonist and easier for more people to identify with than any specific human archetype. There is also some charm in her just being a cat, and I think it really adds to the contrast between the modes of play. It also allowed us to create a story that was more about the NPCs than the player character, but still allows her to be involved.
JOSEPH: We tried to avoid structuring the world around the "player is a cat" idea. For example, when designing a cat-themed game, it would be easy to throw in yarn balls, litter boxes and cat references (nine lives, Paws menu, etc.) everywhere. But Gato contains very little cat-service, which helps to give Kiki a unique identity, existing in an atypically cold and unforgiving world.

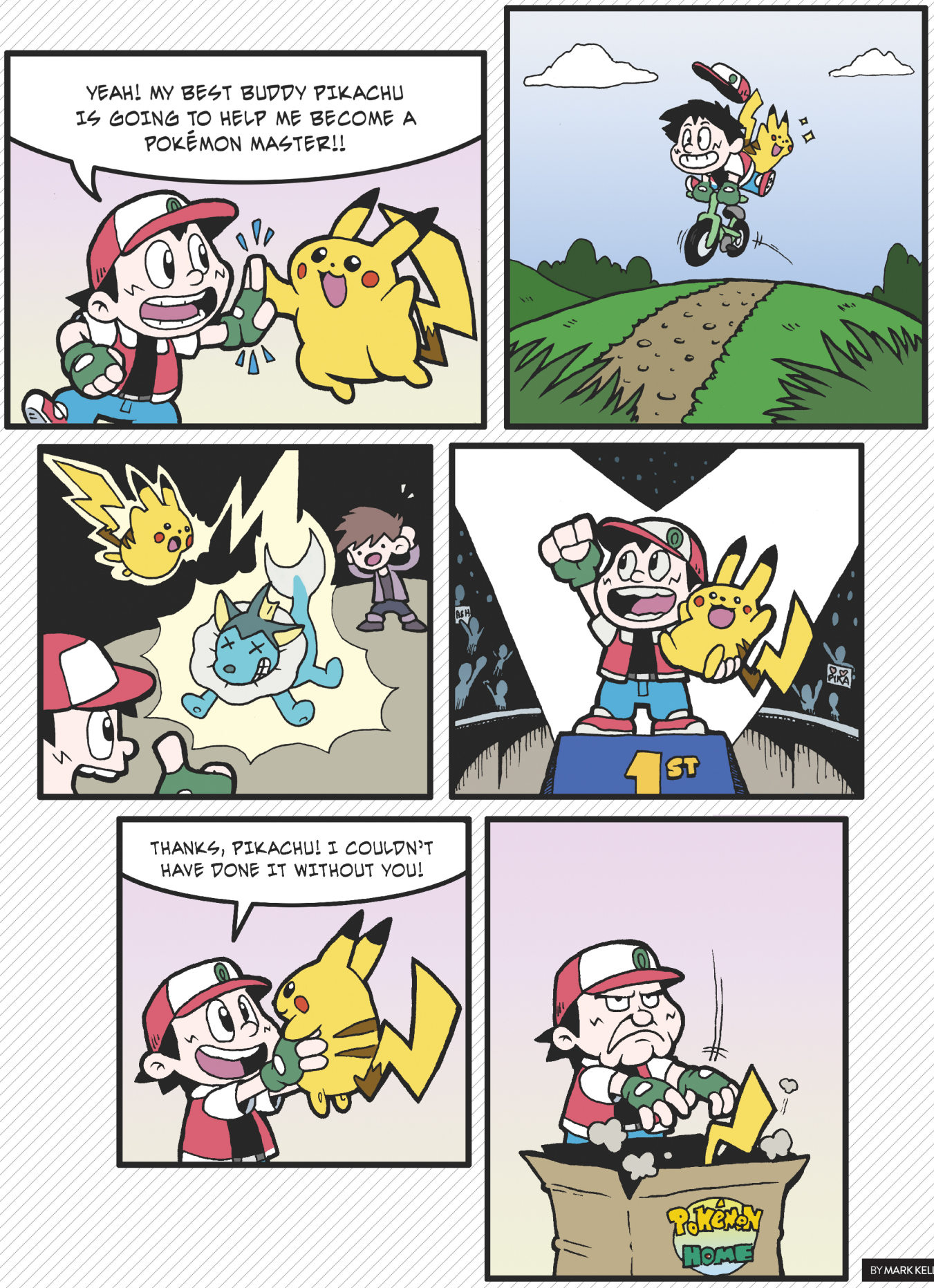
If you could make a game from any Nintendo franchise, what would you make and why?
CULLEN: I'd love to make a handheld Zelda because I'm a fanboy, but I think I would have the most fun making a Kirby game. I love the pink baby and I have like 7,000,000 Copy Ability ideas for him.
BRITT: A Kirby dungeon crawler, because I would love to make all the cute art and characters.
JOSEPH: Kid Icarus, because the original game was full of great imagery and gameplay ideas but could have been a bit more accessible and polished.

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
CULLEN: Immortality, but only if all my homies are also immortal.
BRITT: The power to heal people.
JOSEPH: The power to make eight games in eight weeks and release them during the Devolver E3 press conference. Wait . . . we did that! (And the Devolver Bootleg Launcher is available now on Steam.)

GOTTA MEW FAST!

Gato Roboto is available in the Switch eShop for just $7.99, so why not jump in and enjoy the adventure of Kiki and her massive mechsuit? When you're done you can always try to replay it again, going for speed – or else you can leave that to the experts like RiskyCB, SNeaky and shedd. The three of them recently raced through the game at AGDQ 2020, displaying incredible mastery of every meowvelous maneuver! (For more on the goings-on at AGDQ, keep flippin' to reach Page 78!)





BY MARK KELLY

REVIEWS

The video game industry's biggest animal mascot makes his big screen debut . . . after some big changes in art direction! Read our full review of Sonic the Hedgehog: The Movie!

He's the Fastest Thing Alive!

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

AS THE WORLD bore witness to the first trailer for the Sonic the Hedgehog movie early last year, I was among the many who were — Shocked? Appalled? Disturbed? Unsettled? Let's go with "unsettled" — by what I had just seen. No one expected anything good from this movie even before we saw anything, and the trailer only served to confirm it. Just another Hollywood cash-in that ignores what the existing audience wants in favor of attracting a broader audience who doesn't even know what they're seeing.

Just to set the record straight: I unironically, unabashedly and unapologetically love both the Super Mario Bros. and Street Fighter movies, as well as the Sonic brand, and even I couldn't muster any enthusiasm for this. Any desire to watch it at all — even for free — came from that odd sense of obligation that being a fan of something brings, as well as "maybe Jim Carrey will turn in a good performance."

The backlash was so great that only days later, director Jeff Fowler said that they were going back to the drawing board — at least where Sonic's design was concerned. On November 12, only days after the movie was supposed to have hit theaters, a new trailer arrived with a new design by Tyson Hesse.

I was immediately sold. The new, more endearing design simply clicked. I had low expectations for other aspects of the film, but I felt I could ignore whatever else may come, so long as I got to see this Sonic running around and doing things with Jim Carrey for 100 minutes. Further trailers, previews, interviews and so on only heightened my interest until I finally got to see it on Day 0, the preview night before the official February 14 release.

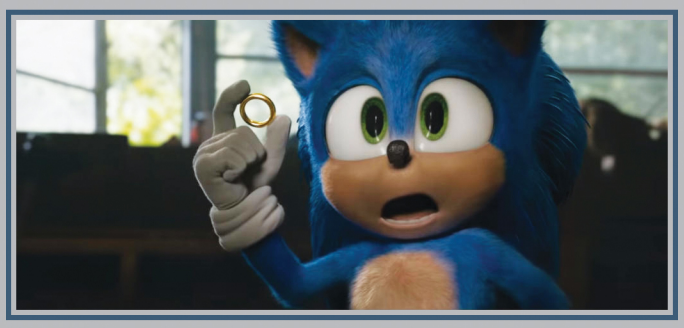
All told, the film exceeded my expectations — *far* more than I was expecting it to ("but I was expecting not to expect something, so it doesn't count"). While the film may be filled with clichés, I felt like they made them work in a Sonic context. For instance, the whole "character comes to our world" thing is, while vaguely defined at best most of the time, an actual part of Sonic lore. Likewise, there are a ton of Easter eggs and nods to the franchise throughout, and most things do make sense in some way or another. Without spoiling anything, there is a character we're introduced to early in the film before Sonic comes to Earth who is an *incredibly* deep cut.

Admittedly, this isn't the Sonic we know. Not exactly. As most movies of this type tend to do, we're basically given an origin story. Sonic has had a good few origins over the years, and while none of them are really canon to the video game version we know today, we're given another one here. Classic Sonic was inspired by classic cartoons, while Modern Sonic tends to give more of a shonen vibe.

For the movie, we get Sonic before he's a hero. He maintains his spirit and confidence, but also bears a sense of loneliness to him that's a driving part of his story and character here. He's young, often excited by things, and over the course of the movie he's living his best life and loving it with the enthusiasm of a kid at the best birthday party imaginable. It's hard not to like the little guy, thanks in part to Ben Schwartz nailing the performance; he sounds a little like Ryan Drummond (his voice actor in Sonic Adventure), but with a different delivery.

Just as we've seen different versions of Sonic over the years, Jim Carrey gives us a new version of Dr.

MOVIE DISTRIBUTER: PARAMOUNT
PRODUCTION BY: SEGA, BLUR STUDIO, ORIGINAL FILM, MARZA A.P., PARAMOUNT ANIMATION, HEDGEHOG FILMS, INC. & DJ2 ENT. RATING: PG



A BEFORE & AFTER COMPARISON OF THE SILVER SCREEN SONIC

When the first trailer for the long-awaited (though at that time, not necessarily long-anticipated) Sonic movie went live on April 30, 2019, interest in the movie tanked, with the only ones fostering a desire to see it being those who love watching trainwrecks and Jim Carrey. It wasn't just fans who were against the look, but the mainstream media as well. Six months, $5,000,000 and a redesign by fan-favorite Sonic artist Tyson Hesse (Sonic Mega Drive, Sonic Mania Adventures, Team Sonic Racing Overdrive) later, the world was introduced to a whole new, much more endearing version of the Blue Blur. (Though it reportedly never made it past the first trailer, some still want to see the film with the old design!)

Eggman — referred to here by his original Western name of Dr. Ivo Robotnik. Some say this is Carrey turned up to 11, but to me, it felt like a character who was very much an Eggman/Robotnik, infused with a bit of Carrey's own mojo. If you fused video game Eggman with vintage '90s Jim Carrey, I'm pretty sure this would be the result. He's a villain to love.

Then we have the other human characters, primarily one Tom Wachowski, played by James Marsden. As this cliché goes, I feel they nailed the right balance, giving Sonic someone to bounce off of who doesn't overshadow the star.

I could talk about this movie for *much* longer, but I can sum things up in three simple words: I love it.

Even if I like some of what they've been doing, Sonic Team has seemed a little directionless in recent years. There has been talk of wanting to reboot the franchise going as far back as 2006, and honestly, if they did decide to do that and use this as the foundation, I think I'd be on board for that. Regardless, in the wake of the movie's box office success, I'm just waiting for a sequel. **— DAVID**

9.0

Too Much of a Mouthful!

SNACK WORLD: THE DUNGEON CRAWL – GOLD

WE'VE ALL DEALT with games bursting with content, and that's normally a good thing. Smash Bros. has a ton of things to do, but it never feels overwhelming and it's all optional. Snack World has a ton of things to do, but it introduces them all to you in the most manic and intrusive way possible early on, and then leaves the rest up to you to discover without help. Your success may be contingent on a specific nugget of info that is easy to miss in the mountain of information thrown your way. You're given a permit by the king for each task the hero can undertake: a permit to use your phone's apps, to shop, to take on missions and even to go online. The first mission is so short that you don't really get a handle on the battle mode's controls – which differ from the control scheme you had just been introduced to in town! The game starts out running you in circles and giving you loads of data to decipher in a plethora of confusing menus but never elaborates on any of it or gives you time to explore – let alone take a breath.

Another problem is the NPCs being annoying stereotypical RPG fodder who blurt canned phrases and emote far too often. The character you generate can say the same phrases as NPCs, so if you choose the wrong speech set you'll be hearing a lot of echoes.

The game tries to inject charm into itself by constantly breaking the fourth wall and mocking RPG staples. Jokes largely miss, as the game offers no chance to build any connections with these one-dimensional contrivances – and for such a cutesy game, there was a lot of swearing and innuendo, making me question who the audience should be.

While learning in the first mission, a character is giving you the battle tutorial during the action but does not stop the action to let you read it. I missed almost all of it, and while it's easy to figure out, it's just another baffling choice the game makes. Once the dungeon crawl portion of the game actually begins, it's fairly fun and straightforward, but quickly becomes rote. The quests are procedurally generated, which gamers love or hate. You'll often stumble into an area with overwhelming foes and buy the farm, and the atrocious camera angle constantly has you peering over walls.

There's little consequence to failing as the game lets you keep the loot you find, but wealth accumulation is slow, and items are expensive. "Jaras" (what the game calls weapons) can be swapped any time, and that's a unique feature and strategy that's easily missed. Gear can be fabricated from materials found in quests, and quests can be solo, with a CPU or online.

So why is it called Snack World? Well, there's a focus on buffs and boosts that come from eating the world's vast array of cuisine. Friendly monsters are also called Snacks, and you can choose one to aid you on quests once you capture a "Snack Shot" during battle. The AI of Snacks and CPU characters is pretty weak. Conversely, you can put a Snack in your pocket and transform into the creature for a short time, which is fun to experiment with.

The game is difficult and unfortunately dependent on grinding. It's also disappointing that the multiplayer and online is so limited. There are so many roadblocks for what in the end feels like a simplistic hack-and-slash dungeon crawler with legitimately interesting features. It's just a shame that half of the crawl is getting past the game's process – and ego.

– BRETT

6.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
RATING: E

Another Look at the Latest Layton

LAYTON'S MYSTERY JOURNEY:
KATRIELLE AND THE MILLIONAIRES' CONSPIRACY - DELUXE EDITION

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
RATING: E10+

I PLAYED THE first Professor Layton game — but only the first — and now it's obvious to me now that a lot has happened in the overall story since. Hershel Layton, the eponymous hero of much of the series, is missing, and in his stead his daughter Katrielle Layton has opened a detective agency in London. When she starts up the agency, she finds a talking dog outside who apparently can only be heard by Kat and Ernest Greeves, Kat's assistant. Kat names the dog Sherl O.C. Kholmes, and the blunt pup operates as comic relief.

This game originally appeared on 3DS, and this is the Deluxe Edition. What's so deluxe about it? First, all of the DLC is added, but that just amounts to some new outfits for Katrielle that can now be purchased using "Fashion Farthings" you accrue during daily gameplay. The Daily Puzzle is still here, as well as 40 new puzzles added to the adventure. On top of this, they reworked several of the puzzles for the Switch to make them more presentable and easier to work, and enhanced the graphics.

The presentation is beautiful. There are great animated cutscenes with dialogue and also fun in-game sequences with audio that give extra depth to the big moments. Most of the adventure takes place with simple text and characters with minimal animation, but it still works. I noticed that the audio was off quite a bit in the opening cutscene, which was jarring to say the least, but the rest of them were fine.

The game centers around 12 cases focused on the "Seven Dragons," or London's wealthiest millionaires. These unfold in a linear fashion but can be paused, interrupted and returned to at the player's discretion. Kat's journal will remind players where they were in a particular investigation on top of a quick "story so far" sequence. With each case, there is a problem that requires going to multiple locations and talking with various colorful folks. Many of these will have puzzles to solve that may or may not be related to the case, and each locale is a look-and-find painting to find Hint Coins, Fashion Farthings, hidden puzzles or clues to the case. Hint Coins unlock hints in puzzles that make them easier to solve, while you can spend your Farthings in the store on outfits. Once you solve enough puzzles, you also get Picarats to use at the end of the game for more content, and Decor Dockets which are used for interior design in Kat's office.

The puzzles themselves are all fairly easy. I even remembered some from the first game. You can judge just how difficult they are by how many Picarats they're worth, but oftentimes I found that the supposedly easier puzzles lacked enough basic info to really suss out what the puzzle was getting at. The ones involving how numbers or letters relate to each other come to mind — but throwing a few Hint Coins at them eventually gave me the requisite info needed to solve them and move on. Hint Coins are incredibly prevalent as well, so there's no need to be shy about it when stuck. Normally the first hint is just a rewording of the original info you receive, but the further you go the juicier they get.

Each case takes around an hour and keeps your interest, and the game's minigames and extra content go well beyond the adventure. I would have liked to see a better payoff to the story's setup at the end of the game — it would have been easy to incorporate little drops of info or hints during the later cases. Oh well. Maybe next time?
— BRETT

8.5

ASK THE FORCE

WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE ANIMAL CROSSING NEIGHBOR?

JONATHAN
I'm a "sucker" for the sweet-and-sour types, so my heart belongs to Tangy, the cat who is also an orange.

CHRIS
I love how Ankha is an enigma of Egyptian mythology and that you need to earn her trust. She has a lot of depth!

BRETT
Mr. Resetti. I love that the whole point of him is to scold the player.

REBECCA
Twiggy was my first-ever best friend in Wild World, and gave me the nickname "Sunshine." I've got her amiibo card and I hope she can make the island trip with me!

DAVID
Goldie seems to show up wherever I go . . .

MARK
In Animal Crossing on GameCube I made good friends with a blue jock chicken named Hector. So imagine my horror to discover that Hector was taken out of all later games! This was my Dexit!

The Quest of the Sabretooth Squirrel

ICE AGE: SCRAT'S NUTTY ADVENTURE!

WHO DOESN'T LOVE Scrat? Well, the same people who hate the Minions, I guess, but I'm a sucker for speechless cartoon animal antics (Shaun the Sheep rules, don't @ me).

There's something about that old-school Looney Tunes charm in the modern era that really makes me smile, which is why I love Scrat's bits in the Ice Age films, despite their slow descent in quality. That's why it's so weird that Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure! is a late 2019 game. To see the little guy get tossed to the wolves like this — after the Ice Age series is on hiatus and its reputation somewhat shot — is nothing short of a travesty. All that said, there is a lot of potential in this Nutty Adventure that just isn't fully realized.

Most people who know me are aware of my love for mascot platformers. I collect them with pride: gems like Jersey Devil, Croc: Legend of the Gobbos, Aero the Acrobat . . . no mascot is safe from my shelf. In spite of the odd timing, I was intrigued by the idea of a all-new Scrat adventure, but the non-optimized state of the game on Switch holds it back.

Think of it is a budget game — the kind of thing you'd pick up on the original PlayStation for significantly cheaper than MSRP. In fact, the original PlayStation metaphor is probably right on the nose, as this feels like a game from several generations ago. And that's fine! The level design is actually fairly engaging given that the collect-athon elements exist but aren't the full focus, and levels are given a wide berth in terms of design freedom.

Scrat's Nutty Adventure! does a great job of making it feel like you have navigation options when really, it's leading you down a linear path. That's a tricky thing to do in an era that tends to go completely overboard with either philosophy (a completely bloated open world with millions of checklist icons, or a full-on tunnel simulator).

The main hang-up? Technical issues. The game could have benefited from a bit more time in the oven; at least as far as the Switch port is concerned. It's an easy-breezy cute little platformer for kids that deserves a bit more love. Developer Just Add Water was onto something here, piping in some great concepts from past 3D platformers, but the follow-through is a swing and a miss! **— CHRIS**

5.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER: JUST ADD WATER
RATING: E

7.0

From the Makers of Mother 3

HEROLAND

ON ITS SURFACE, Heroland is the JRPG equivalent of Disney's Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: a fun theme park where guests can re-enact famous dungeon-crawling battles of yore, attacking monsters with enchanted weapons and magic and collecting valuable treasure. But for one young man with the unfortunate nickname of Lucky, it's where he's forced to earn his keep, trudging through dungeon after dungeon. It's also one of the funniest games I've played on the Switch so far!

As Heroland's newest tour guide, you create a party of four heroes, equip them with appropriate weapons, pack your bag with items, grab your colored flags and set off into the depths of dungeons populated by monsters like Green Tea Slugs, massive cookie jars, vicious vegetables and living gumball machines.

That's basically all there is to it — your party goes into auto-battle while you stand on the sidelines, giving advice (you can directly influence one character or "flag" the entire party at set intervals) and handing out restorative items. Sounds great on paper — but the sad thing is, the battles get dull and repetitive extremely fast. I was hoping there was a way to tweak the battle AI so my healers wouldn't burn through their skill points so often. I mostly hit the R Button to ramp the speed up to 3x and kept an eye on things, but there was not much to look forward to in the dungeons except for the cutscenes and battle banter.

Luckily, the only stat you'll need to grind is your friendship level with the visitors — the MonCoin EXP you win after completing every dungeon gets shared with all the park's visitors, so you'll never be underleveled.

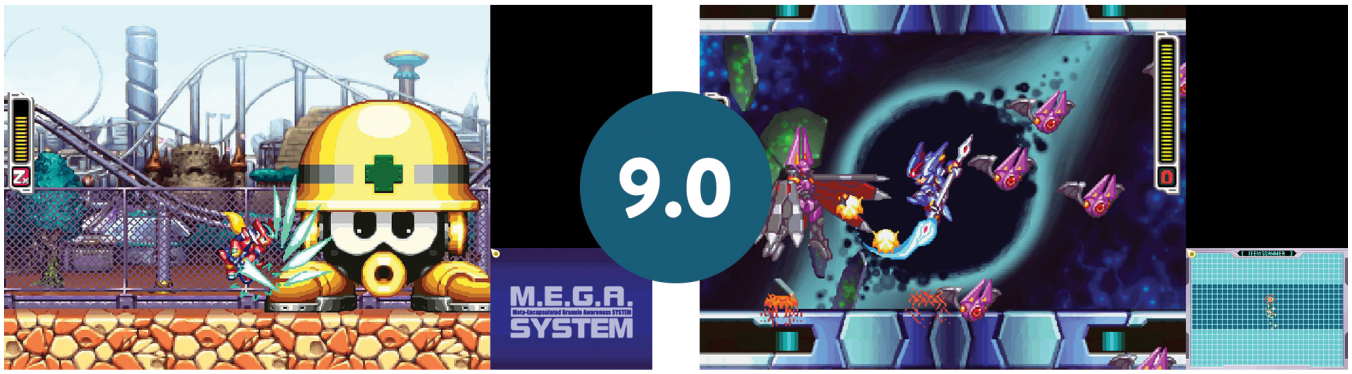
What *isn't* dull and repetitive? The wacky hijinks surrounding Lucky, his coworkers and the clientele of Heroland. You've got a former crown prince now 18th in line thanks to a new law that takes age — including *dog years* — into account, a secret phantom thief, dark knights fascinated with fidget spinners, a family of four on a rather unique vacation, some YouTubers, constant confusion as to what century this game even takes place in, pop stars, a retelling of the legend of Momotaro except with romanesco instead of peaches, and otters. *LOTS* of otters. (I guess using mice would've been too dangerous?)

By the way, did I mention that all of the characters are named after programming languages? There were a lot of moments when I just let out a huge belly laugh at what I was reading on the screen, and if there was a "Cram as Many Pop Culture References from the Last Twenty-Odd Years into a Localization" contest, then XSEED's the winner by a landslide . . . although it did make me wonder what degree of zaniness made it in from the original. (I'm pretty sure Fortran the knight singing Frankie Goes to Hollywood's "Relax" sure wasn't.) There's even a few affectionate pokes at some of the more common JRPG tropes (the conversation about dialogue choices in the beginning is hilarious) and amusement park fandom as well.

One of the most charming aspects of Heroland is the visual style, which consists of 3D pixel characters moving about the screen like they're stick puppets, with a few animations to portray emotion and show action. Even the monsters all have unique touches so that they're not straight palette swaps of each other. Every character has a lineart version of them that appears in the dialogue scenes and it's always interesting to see how well the transition to pixels turned out. The sound presentation, unfortunately, is rather dull, with only a few pieces of music that I thought really stood out. I felt like the regular and boss battle themes were almost indistinguishable from each other and just blended into an amorphous mass of sound in my mind.

The only thing holding me back from wholeheartedly recommending Heroland is its largely hands-off combat, but if you're willing to overlook that, you'll find yourself playing one of the funniest video games in years! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPERS: FURYU & NETCHUBIYORI LTD. RATING: T



Two More Series Make the Switch, Together!

MEGA MAN ZERO/ZX LEGACY COLLECTION

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of the Mega Man and Mega Man X Legacy Collection releases, it was only natural for Capcom to keep the hits coming. To that end, there were two logical routes down which they could venture forth: Follow release chronology, which would mean Mega Man Legends, or storyline chronology, which would mean Mega Man Zero. Obviously, they chose the latter.

The Mega Man Zero series flings us even further into the future, about a century after the X saga ends, whenever that will eventually be. Four games present a story arc presenting a mystery behind Zero himself, and reaching a climactic conclusion. Some 200 years after that, the world experiences a period of relative peace, but echoes from the past threaten to stir up trouble as new heroes are called upon to defend it in the ZX duology.

For this collection, these two series have been ported from the Nintendo DS (the Zero games were originally for Game Boy Advance, but the versions seen here seem to be taken from the Mega Man Zero Collection for the DS). As such, they feature different resolutions from the previous Legacy Collections released by Capcom, meaning that while they look fairly similar in the Switch's Handheld Mode, they're blown up a bit for TV Mode, and the pixelated graphics tend to feel a little more pronounced as a result. You can use CRT or smoothing filters to try to mitigate this if it bothers you, or simply go without. Similarly, you can also change how the viewing window for the game fits the screen.

The Mega Man Zero series is particularly challenging, as Mega Man games go, so the most notable addition to this collection is the Casual Scenario Mode. This works similarly, if not nearly identically, to the Easy Scenario Mode in the DS collection, except that it doesn't force you to play through the four games in sequential order. Players are given most of the abilities, tools and so on that the game has to offer, with only a few exceptions.

This feature also extends to the ZX titles, which originally had their own Easy Modes. Perhaps to maintain consistency, the Easy Mode is no longer accessible in these games, but now seems to be renamed as Casual Scenario Mode and must instead be toggled on in the launcher. This bears mentioning, because the original Easy Modes did not overpower you quite as much as the Casual Scenario Modes seen in the Zero games, meaning they might actually have been just a little more difficult.

If you don't want to go that far, but would still prefer an easier time, all-new Save-Assist checkpoints (which can be similarly toggled) are placed throughout the stages of each game. These not only give you additional checkpoints when you die, but also provide saves that can be launched from the game's main menu, separately from each game's main save data.

The overall presentation quality for these games is higher, too. As noted, the Zero games come from the Nintendo DS, which had higher-quality sound, and in the ZX games, the animated cutscenes are now in higher quality too, and you can choose whether to hear the original DS voice samples, or new ones taken from the original voice recordings.

You'll also find the usual bevy of bonuses, including galleries, music players, Mega Man Zero 3's e-Reader content and a new Z-Chaser mode, which features two stages from each game at a variety of difficulties as you race against others around the world.

With another great collection under its belt, we can only wonder now where Capcom goes next: Thousands of years further into a watery future, or a side trip into cyberspace?

– DAVID

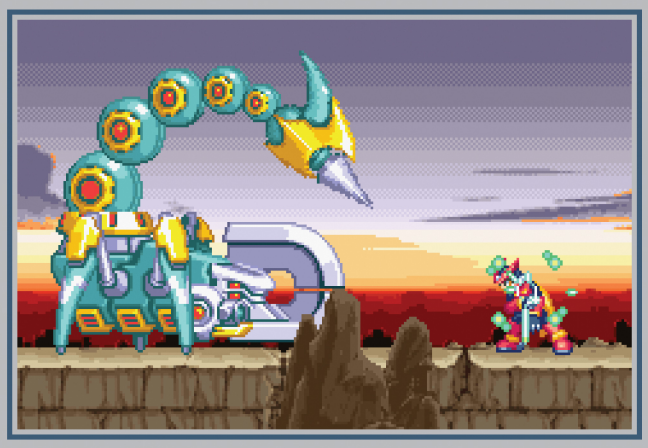
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RATING: T

THE INDIVIDUAL APPEAL OF EACH INCLUDED INSTALLMENT

The Mega Man Zero and Mega Man ZX series stand as some of the most unique sidescrolling platforming games the entire franchise has to offer. Developer Inti Creates saw to it that each title represented in this collection would have something unique to help it stand out not only from the Classic and X series, but also from each other.

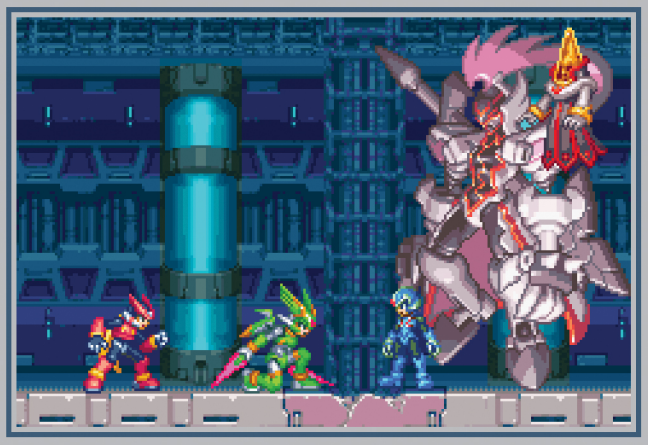
MEGA MAN ZERO

The first Mega Man Zero is probably the most unique among the four titles to bear the name, as well as the most difficult. It introduces several new concepts, including leveling up weapons, a more mission-based structure with ranking and fail states and an overworld through which most of the mission levels are connected.



MEGA MAN ZERO 2

Mega Man Zero 2 returns things to more of a normal Mega Man-style structure by allowing you to choose levels based on who the boss is again, and taking Zero to areas beyond the Resistance base's borders. The new Form System grants those players who are skilled enough to earn them new skills based on how they fight.

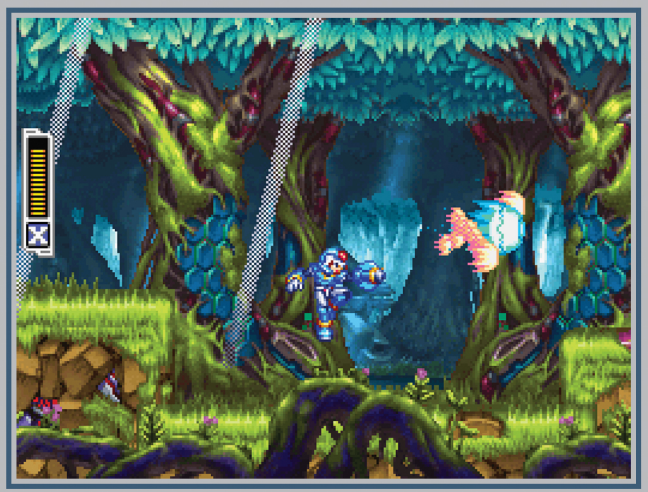


MEGA MAN ZERO 3

As mysteries begin to unravel, Zero 3 introduces Cyberspace, an alternate version of stages where Cyber-elves are able to raise Zero's power tremendously without sacrificing themselves. Collectible Secret Disks contain Cyber-elves, character data and Customization Chips, which replaces the Form System from Zero 2.

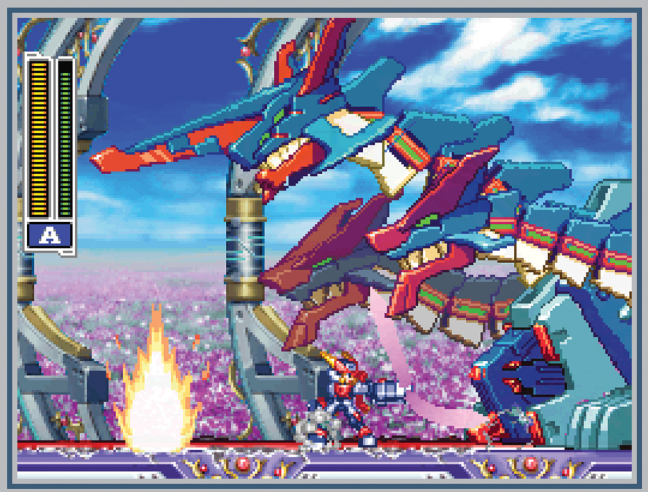
MEGA MAN ZERO 4

It was once believed it'd be a cold day in a warm place before any Mega Man series saw a definitive end, but Z4's Weather System lets you make it as cold or warm as you like, affecting obstacles and bosses. Meanwhile the Z Knuckle elevates power-stealing by allowing you to rip weapons right off enemies!



MEGA MAN ZX

It's morphin' time! Metroidvania meets Mega Man as two teenagers with attitude are chosen by Biometal Model X to become a new type of Mega Man, capable of Megamerging with other Biometals to use the powers of warriors from the past.



MEGA MAN ZX ADVENT

With Model A, new heroes Ashe and Grey are able to use A-Trans to completely replicate the forms, powers and abilities of Pseudoroids and other Mega Men alike. Both characters play a bit different and have slightly different stories, too.

SECOND OPINION
NEW SUPER LUCKY'S TALE

HAPPY ANIMAL MASCOTS took command of Christmas morning in the Thomas home this past holiday season, as Calvin unwrapped New Super Lucky's Tale and Carter scored the latest Yooka-Laylee. I chose this one for the younger of the two oldest brothers thanks in part to David's assertion in our last issue that this "feels like a good place to start for newcomers to 3D platforming adventures." I concur! Though I never played the older versions of this same game, the New edition on the Switch is sensational. It's colorful, jovial and not too tough. It has goofy groaner jokes that I (as a Dad) fully appreciate. It even has a character named Lucas! The best is the mix of gameplay styles that it presents to players, as not everything is a 3D collectathon — it's nice to take a break and do some 2D platforming from time to time. The worst is, as David also mentioned, the absolutely horrid load times. **— LUCAS**

9.0 DAVID

9.0 LUCAS

SECOND OPINION
YOOKA-LAYLEE AND THE IMPOSSIBLE LAIR

IF 2D PLATFORMING is what you'd prefer as your primary way to interact with cute animal mascots, consider joining Carter in ownership of Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair. Tony praised this second release from Playtonic two issues ago, saying, "I had doubts concerning Playtonic's ability to evolve past their '90s game design mentality, but they've proved this naysayer wrong with a strong rebound performance!" I'm going to concur again, as this does feel like a stronger design than the first Yooka-Laylee. And I loved that one! Carter got really into it for several days, making considerable progress — he left the quest unfinished when he got frustrated by the Paywalls in the game, though. If you want to better judge for yourself whether or not you'd enjoy it, there's now a free demo in the Switch eShop! **— LUCAS**

9.0 TONY

9.0 LUCAS

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Blade Strangers	7.0	Jonathan	#36
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	7.5	Neal	#35
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy	7.5	David	#35
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Dark Souls: Remastered	8.0	Chris	#37
Diablo III: Eternal Collection	9.0	Nadia	#37
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Ball FighterZ	8.0	Tony	#36
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Dreamworks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders	7.5	David	#39
Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	9.5	David	#34
DOOM	8.0	Tony	#33
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Fitness Boxing	5.5	Chris	#38
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Hyrule Warriors: Definitive Edition	7.5	Neal	#34
Katamari Damacy REROLL	9.5	Tony	#38
Kirby Star Allies	7.0	Brett	#33
LEGO DC Super-Villains	8.0	Thor	#38
Little Dragons Café	7.0	Rebecca	#36
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Mario Tennis Aces	6.5	Lucas	#35
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man 11	11/13	David	#36
Mega Man Legacy Collection	9.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man X Legacy Collection	9.5	Jonathan	#35
Mega Man X Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Jonathan	#35
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom	8.5	David	#38
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	7.5	Kevin K.	#37
Moonlighter	8.0	Lucas	#39
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
Namco Museum Arcade Pac	7.0	Brett	#38
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe	8.0	Lucas	#38
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Nickelodeon Kart Racers	5.0	David	#37
Nintendo Labo Robot Kit	7.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Variety Kit	8.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Vehicle Kit	8.5	Lucas	#36
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Octopath Traveler	8.5	Brett	#35
Overcooked! 2	7.0	Brett	#35
Owlboy	9.5	Chris	#33
Paw Patrol: On a Roll	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee!	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
RiME	7.0	Lucas	#33
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Runner3	8.0	Kevin C.	#34
Scribblenauts Mega Pack	7.5	David	#37
Scribblenauts Showdown	7.5	David	#33
Sega Genesis Classics	8.5	Brett	#38
Shantae: Half-Genie Hero – Ultimate Edition	8.0	Tony	#34
Shining Resonance Refrain	7.0	Neal	#36
SNK 40th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Thor	#38
Sonic Mania Plus	9.0	Tony	#35
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Starlink: Battle for Atlas	8.5	David	#37
Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Jonathan	#34
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Mario Party	9.0	Lucas	#36
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
Super Smash Bros. Ultimate	10	Lucas	#37
Sushi Striker: The Way of Sushido	7.5	Rebecca	#34
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The World Ends With You: Final Remix	6.5	Rebecca	#37
Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes	8.0	Jonathan	#38
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Valkyria Chronicles 4	8.5	Neal	#36
Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus	8.5	Neal	#35
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
Xenoblade Chronicles 2: Torna ~ The Golden Country	8.5	Kevin K.	#36
Yonder: The Cloud Catcher Chronicles	7.0	Neal	#35
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43
Yoshi's Crafted World	7.5	Lucas	#39
Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of DANA	9.5	Lucas	#36

3DS

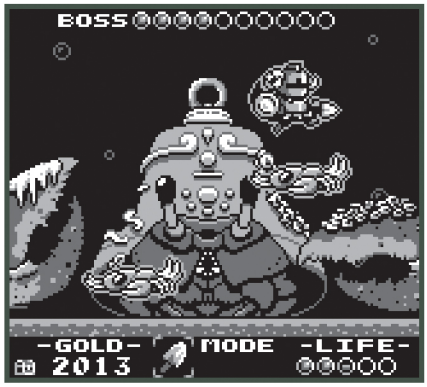
TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Detective Pikachu	7.0	Rebecca	#33
Etrian Odyssey Nexus	8.5	Nadia	#39
Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn	7.5	Neal	#39
Luigi's Mansion	8.0	Neal	#36
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story + Bowser Jr.'s Journey	9.0	Neal	#38
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40
Radiant Historia: Perfect Chronology	8.0	Thor	#33
The Alliance Alive	5.5	Neal	#33
WarioWare Gold	8.5	Thor	#35
Yo-kai Watch 3	8.5	Lucas	#39
Yo-kai Watch Blasters: Red Cat Corps & White Dog Squad	6.5	Lucas	#37

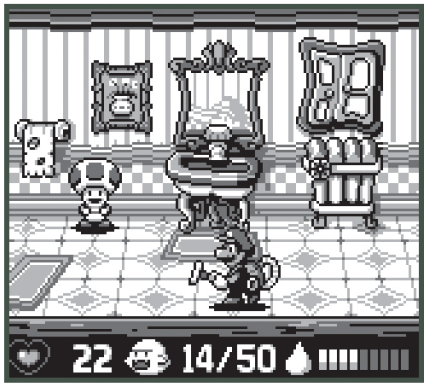
SECOND OPINION
SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ

DAVID'S KEY CRITICISM in his review centered on the abysmally bad boss battles, and I have to agree that they are, for the most part, wretched. But my greatest disappointment came instead with the mini-games, as they are woefully poorly executed. Playing minigames like Monkey Billiards, Monkey Golf and especially Monkey Target dominated days of multi-player competition in the Thomas household back in the GameCube era, but the 10 minis provided here all feel like they were given a tenth of the love and care of those made nearly 20 years ago. The main game, thankfully, remains whimsical and fun. **– LUCAS**

7.5 DAVID

6.5 LUCAS





EXCELLENCE IN PIXEL ART

GAME BOY GAMES THAT NEVER WERE

Imagining what might have been, thanks to Game Boy Demakes!

CARE FOR SOME revisionist history? One imaginative and terrifically talented pixel artist is turning back the clock to present alternate timeline Game Boy games that never really existed!

NF: First up, for our readers who don't know you or your work yet, can you introduce yourself?
2BITCROOK: I'm 2bitcrook. I make demakes, remakes and "original" Game Boy games based on video games, movies, cartoons/anime and more!

Why the Game Boy? As a pixel artist you've got countless options. Why restrict yourself to just four colors and a 160x144 screen resolution?
The Game Boy has a very special place in my heart. It was my first handheld, and it was such a great system. I have very fond memories of playing Game Boy games on the Super Game Boy on SNES. I would always set the palette to black and white because it always had the best level of contrast. Then when I would visit my older brother, I'd bring over my SNES and play on a black-and-white TV he bought for me, you can probably say that also helped develop my love of greyscale!

In my first year of being a pixel artist, when I was copying NES sprites, even with the limited NES palette I would get hung up on what colors to use. Outside this, with modern systems, the amount of colors available is in the tens of thousands, and similarly I can pretty much use any resolution I want . . . the choices are almost suffocating! So I needed limitations, I needed constraints, I needed . . . the Game Boy!

With the Game Boy, I didn't need to worry about anything else other than what to create. No hemming and hawing over whether I should use X by Y resolution, or what exact shade of green to use. When you only have limited space, the further down you go, each pixel matters so much more and I love that challenge!

Your demakes are sometimes direct deimaginings of existing games, like Luigi's Mansion. But other times you come up with unique "What If?" game ideas like Banjo-Ooie and Trowel Knight. Is there one approach you prefer? What makes you decide which direction to take when starting each one?
Each one comes with its own unique challenges. For demakes, reimagining a game that is usually 3D as a 2D experience is a really interesting design prompt. For remakes, the challenge comes from exactly how to polish or rework existing Game Boy games. Then we have the "What Ifs," which are quite the wild card! That's where I have the chance to create completely made-up concepts for imaginary games that I, and others I hope, would have loved to be real fully-fledged games!

BANJO-OOIE

Banjo-Tooie turns 20 years old this year, and fans are still holding out hope that we might finally see a real Banjo-Threeie to carry the story forward. 2bitcrook, though, went the opposite direction, imagining a 2D Metroidvania-style prequel to the 3D collectathon original! In Banjo-Ooie, our heroic bear is still just a cub – and Kazooie hasn't even hatched yet! The two meet for the first time, joining forces to save the world from a wicked sea witch named Snarleen. Said 2bitcrook, "For the ending I fell in love with the idea that once you give Snarleen a good one-two, a tooth falls out which Banjo makes into his shark tooth necklace. I like it when prequels get to explain stuff like that without breaking any continuity or giving it too much meaning."

INTERVIEW BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

ANIMAL CROSSING: FISHALOT FALLS

What if the Animal Crossing series had gotten its start a little earlier? Say, early enough that it was already having spin-offs in the mid-'90s? Inspired by Happy Home Designer and its concept of expanding one part of the core series' gameplay into a whole game all its own, 2bitcrook imagined the fishing aspect of AC village life taking on a life of its own. "Where would an Animal Crossing game be set if it was just about fishing? Why it'd be set in a faraway forest with an abundance of lakes and streams where you sure could fish . . . alot! Who would run the bait shop? Well, why not have Mr. Resetti run it, since he's on a break and also have an excuse to draw Mr. Resetti in a fisherman's hat?"

For direction, my thought process can vary quite wildly, especially for original "What Ifs." I'll think, "What would a game based on this certain IP, if made in the heyday of Game Boy, look like? And how would it play? Also if it's not something that's connected to an existing game company, what company might have created this, if the original IP owners gave the license to them? Who would they have trusted at this time period (like Disney having a strong working relationship with Capcom)?" At other times my thought process of a demake is more like "Yeah, Mario Sunshine. But 2D."

This was my mindset going into every project all at once, with the possibility of doing any type of project. Thankfully not too long ago, I began having my patrons vote for which project I'll do next. Currently I keep it quite vague such as "demake, remake or original" but I've begun giving less vague options. Last time I let them vote between Cartoon Network and Nickleodeon, and the former won by a landslide — giving us my latest demake, Cartoon Network Grand Toonament!

How did you first get into pixel art? Where should someone new who's interested in becoming a pixel artist get started?

I began by copying and editing Mega Man sprites for my own tiny projects, then I moved on to creating sprites in the Mega Man style to eventually branching out and creating my own sprites. I'm quite abysmal with pencil and paper, but with a mouse and MS Paint I'm in my element! (I still use MS Paint. I'll move on eventually, but it matches my simple soul.) A joke I tell myself is that if I'm working at such a small resolution, it's less space to mess up!

The most succinct advice to anyone interested in pixel art is to literally just start. I only started six years ago and if I had started even a year before I can only imagine how much better I would be. But, conversely, it's never too late! As archaic and barebones as it is, you really can start out with MS Paint. But if that's too extreme, I recommend Paint.NET. Down the line, splurge for a graphics tablet if that's more your cup of tea, and some pixel-specific software like Asesprite or Pro Motion NG or GraphicsGale. But really, just try it hassle-free for a while.

Finally, I recommend the Pixel Joint tutorial (literally just Google that, it's the top result), as it's really the gold standard for covering every aspect of pixel art. For other study material, find it! Use the wonderful library of material the great contributors of Spriters Resource have amassed, study games from different systems with different restraints. Study the good *and* the bad — see what works and how things don't work!

Oh, and this is more a general thing, but progress is slow — but it's all progress! You'll be a better pixel artist tomorrow than you were today and you're a better artist today than you were yesterday.

Your Game Boy Demakes clearly blow away many of the actual Game Boy games released over the course of that system's life cycle. Would your designs have been viable to run on real hardware, or is this artwork that pushes beyond what Nintendo could have really achieved?

Yes . . . no . . . and maybe? It's really a mixture of all three. The true Game Boy limitations are incredibly, and wonderfully, limiting. 160x144 resolution. 2-bit color (four shades of grey). 8x8 pixel tiles. Sprites can only have three colors: One is reserved for transparency (though layering sprites, like the NES Mega Man games, is possible). And the real harsh limit is the screen can only be comprised of 256 unique 8x8 tiles. You have to really think about how you lay out your tiles. (Kirby is a great example of how Sakurai reused halves of Waddle Dees and Waddle Doos to create more unique enemies.)

But even with me not abiding every single limitation of the Game Boy, there have been some really neat fans of mine who have done some snazzy conversion projects. One fan ported the intro cutscene for Mario Hockey Rink Rumble and tweaked it to run on an actual Game Boy! Another fan started work on using sprites from my Mario Land remake to create a working submarine level.

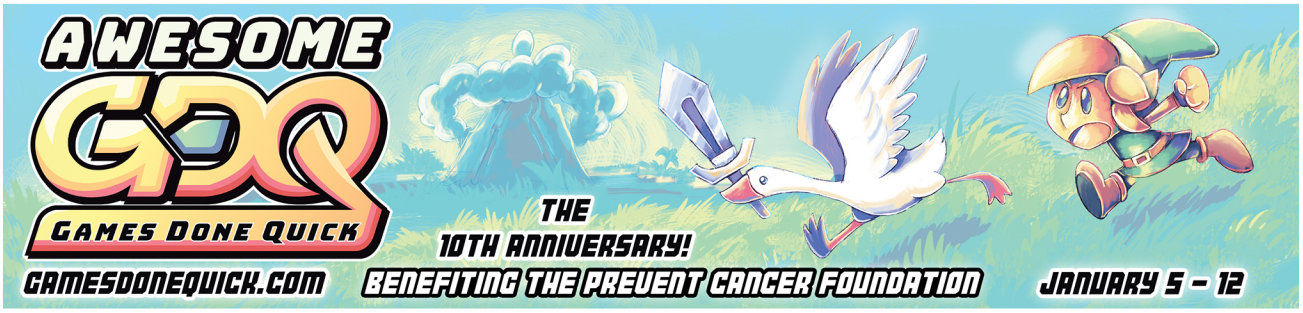
I've recently hit 31 projects so far. When I started out I really only focused on the two basics of resolution and palette. With each project I get a little better and I focus more on the true limitations of the system. A recent remake I did was of the Konami roguelike Cave Noire, where the sprites from that could be romhacked/swapped with the actual sprites and it would 100% work. My most recent "What If" of Cartoon Network Grand Toonament is also quite in keeping with the limitations: All sprites only use three colors. I hope to continue to get better and know when to follow the book by the letter, but also when to bend the rules. As they say, know the rules well enough, then break them!

What can we look forward to seeing next?

Oh, so many things! I pretty much have 22 or so projects all started in some manner. To name a few: I'd love to do a Rescue Rangers 3 Game Boy installment, a Gummi Bears JRPG, a Bubblegum Crisis beat-'em-up and a remake of Mulan or Beetlejuice! But I get new ideas all the time, and love getting suggestions. So if you have any, feel free to tweet them to **@GameBoyDemakes** on Twitter!

GameBoyDemakes.Tumblr.com

Patreon.com/GameBoyDemakes



SPEEDRUNNING FOR CHARITY

GAMES DONE QUICK HITS A DECADE!

And after 10 years, they're still not slowing down!

GDQ HAS BECOME an absolutely indispensable spectacle. To mark the milestone of the twice-annual week-long charity speedrunning marathon turning 10 years old, we asked our own LLK – who also serves as the artist-in-residence for the GDQ team – to share some memories! **– LUCAS**

I GOT MY first email from Mike Uyama in 2009. He told me he was from Speed Demos Archive and wanted to know if I was interested in making some promotional banners for him. A group called The Speed Gamers (now known as "TSG.tv") had made some waves with their week-long Final Fantasy marathon, but despite the name, the event was not based around speedrunning. Mike explained that SDA wanted to do something similar in 2010, but with speed as the primary focus. I was a huge fan of SDA and speedruns in general, so I accepted.

. . . Jeez, has it really been 10 years? It feels like a lifetime ago.

My mind drifted back to that fateful day as I entered the stream room the day before Awesome Games Done Quick 2020. The ballroom was enormous; two screens displayed test footage as they loomed over rows of chairs. Front and center stood the game consoles and televisions, accompanied by the runner's chair and the couch. Behind the cameras were racks of supplies, rows of computers and mixers that controlled the on-screen layouts and audio. A table lined with screens would serve as the "donation station" once the event started, and the host's desk was supplied with everything from notepads to cough drops. On one end of the ballroom was a green room for runners to prepare for their runs, and on the other end was a set for interviews and prize showcases. Staff members were still racing about performing last-minute tests, stocking shelves, positioning cameras and plugging in headphones. Still, there was a strong sense of community; everyone waved hello to me when I entered and there were a lot of jokes and hugs even during this busy time.

Back in 2010 it was just a small gang of gamers huddled onto a couch in a basement.

I thought about that first marathon as Mike stepped onstage for his run of Super Hydlide. The game was part of the now-famous "Awful Block," which was a section of the marathon dedicated to showcasing some of the weirdest and worst games ever made. Mike appeared in full costume for the run, which required ridiculous tasks such as throwing coins into a fountain for several minutes and picking up nonsensical "joke" items. Every time a joke item was acquired, his commentators held up sparkling signs that read "IT'S A JOKE", while audience members held signs that read "LUCKY", both based on the game's text boxes.

I made the signs myself and thought back to when I was first asked to take on other artistic roles for the marathons, such as the time I was asked to make stream layouts. Complex layouts were almost nonexistent back then, so I only had to make simple designs with flat colors . . . and boy, it did not work out! One year I made the terrible mistake of basing the entire layout off of a neon spring green color I used in the banner. There were so many complaints from the audience that I actually had to change the color and email GDQ a new layout mid-event!

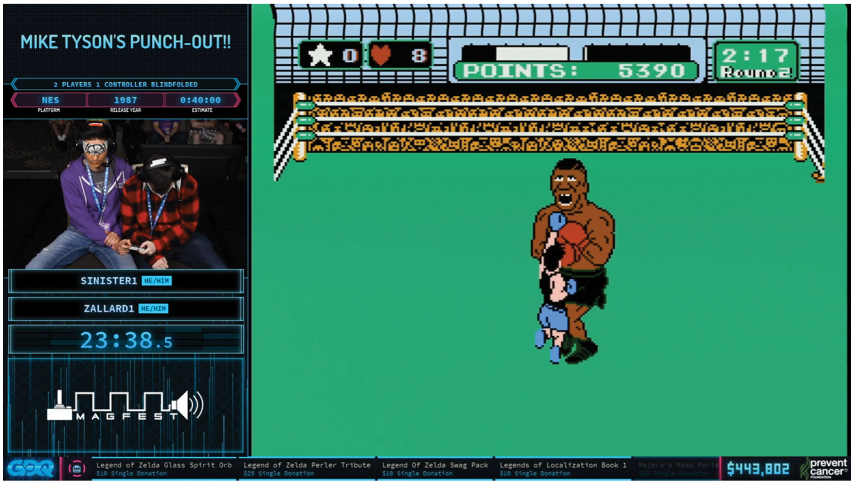
I felt so bad at the time, but now I can look back on it and laugh, especially with the professionally made layouts GDQ has today. Now the layouts are specially coded to show off tons of info about the runner and the game being played. They can even be customized to show progress in specific games, and this came in handy during Andy's run of the Link to the Past randomizer. The run utilized Crowd Control, a mod that allows the audience to directly help or hinder the player. Sure, the viewers could give Link extra Heart Containers . . . or they could turn him into a Psyduck and sic an army of bees on him!

That wasn't the only run full of impressive gimmicks. One of my personal favorites was Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!, run by Zallard1 and Sinister1. Not only were both of them blindfolded for the

BANNER ARTWORK BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

entire game, but they played while sharing a single controller as well! The level of coordination and communication between these two legendary speedrunners was nothing short of amazing. Blindfolded Punch-Out!! has such a rich history at these events and it really felt like the perfect addition to the anniversary.

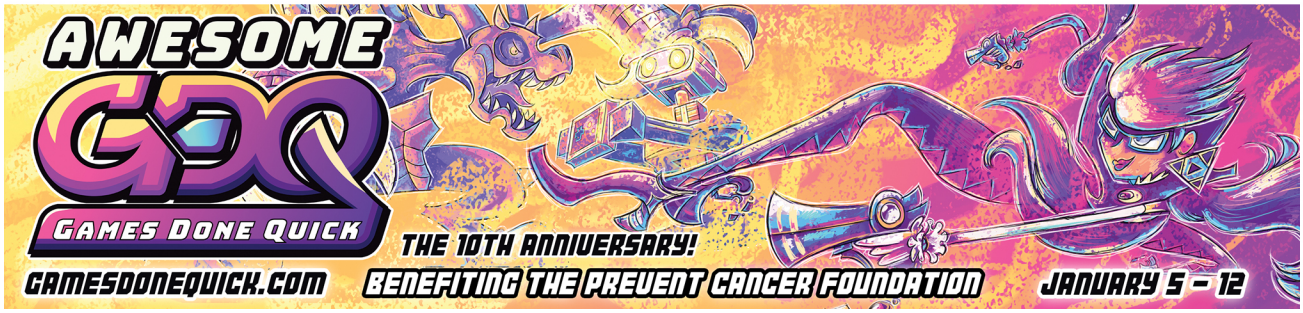
Speaking of runs with a history at Games Done Quick, the event ended with none other than Super Metroid, run by the supremely skilled Oatsngoats. However, this was no ordinary showing of the classic SNES title; this was Super Metroid Impossible, a mod that kicks the difficulty up so high that only a select few can even beat it. The audience was immediately treated to this hack's ferociousness when it only gave Oatsngoats a third of the time to escape the exploding facility at the very beginning of the game. As harrowing as the rest of the run was, nothing really compared to the Ridley fight. This superpowered version of the beast truly lived up to his title as the "Cunning God of Death" as he destroyed the runner repeatedly before he could be taken down. The crowd continued to cheer despite all of these hardships, getting louder and more supportive when the game was especially cruel. By the end of the run they even showed their faith in the runner's abilities by donating to save the animals despite the significantly shorter timer for the final escape sequence. Rescuing the cute critters nearly cost Samus her life, but Oatsngoats was treated to a standing ovation upon finishing the game.

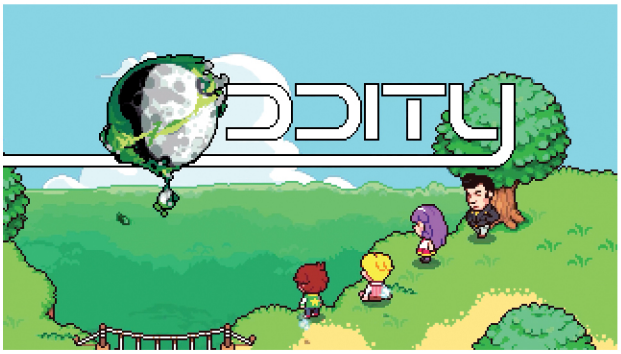


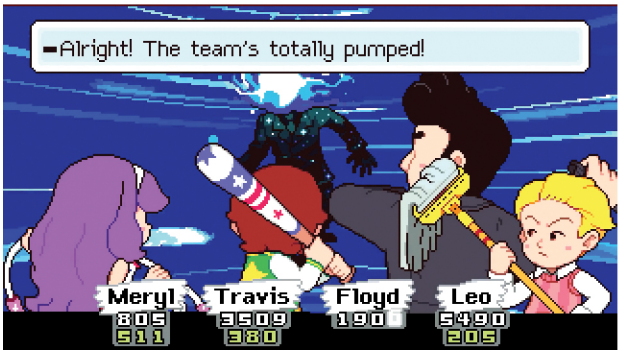
I looked at the grand total. $3,131,380 for the Prevent Cancer Foundation. The first GDQ raised $10,531.64 after hours of technical issues and scheduling struggles. My mind drifted back to that day. I was no longer alone in a room, quietly cheering on people I could barely see through a choppy Internet connection. I was there, alongside them, standing before an enormous live crowd and an even bigger audience watching on their own computers. My banners were used in their social media campaigns. My whiteboards and chalkboards decorated their interview sets. My badges were required just to attend. I even had the honor of designing Velocity, GDQ's mascot, and enjoying the scores of fanart posted online. This anniversary wasn't just one person's triumph. It was all of ours. Only by working together and helping each other succeed were we able to accomplish something so beautiful. This was a celebration not just of the largest speedrunning charity marathon, but of what we as human beings can achieve when we unite for the common good.

Here's to another decade of speedruns, generosity, community and fun! I don't know what's going to happen in the future, but I sure can't wait to find out! **— LINDSEY**

GamesDoneQuick.com







FAN GAMES

MOTHER 4 IS NO MORE

The fan-made EarthBound sequel is now known as Oddity!

I DON'T KNOW about you, but I've long since given up expecting Nintendo to announce an official Mother 3 localization. In fact, during my recent teaching tenure in Japan, I decided to bite the bullet and snag a pre-owned Mother 3 cartridge along with a translation patch. I've had my fill of Lucas and company's exploits, thank you very much! Time to look ahead!

This is the part where I would have gushed about the Mother 4 fan game — you know, the one we last discussed all the way back in Issue #21, a good four years ago? I would love to wax triumphant about its rich world and endearing characters, but despite the extensive production time, our lives remain Mother-less. So . . . what's the holdup?

We can't discount the difficulties the team has faced while collaborating on a free-to-download RPG on a non-existent budget for non-existent pay, but the potential threat of Nintendo's legal eagles has been just as big a concern. In August 2016, the unofficial Metroid II remake AM2R arrived to widespread acclaim; the following month, Nintendo issued a DMCA takedown request, signaling a shift toward a more hard-line stance against fan-made games. And considering how (an action figure caricature of) former NOA President Reggie Fils-Aime once *literally* torched a journalist for merely mentioning Mother 3, who knows what they'd do to a new piece of software that dared to carry the Mother name!

Fortunately, the Mother 4 crew had the foresight to plan for such contingencies. Though the game emulates the soft-edge aesthetic and emotional tempo of Shigesato Itoi's landmark trilogy, the story and cast are entirely original. Akin to Final Fantasy sequels, there are no direct connections to past chapters, only the odd cameo and musical throwback here and there. A little light trimming would be all that was required to stay in the Big N's good graces while delivering on the promise of a Mother-inspired odyssey. Nothing was preventing them from having their trout yogurt and eating it too!

On January 2, 2020, the team uploaded a re-reveal teaser for the project formerly known as Mother 4. Everyone from the original playable character lineup — baseball-loving Travis, psychically gifted Meryl, resourceful Floyd and tough-as-nails Leo — returns with even cleaner sprite animations than before, still on a quest across the land of Pleiades to solve the mystery of the "Modern Men" and their connection to the population's sudden disappearance. And at the end of the new trailer appears a striking logo of a moon dripping with ooze, forming the "O" in the rebranded title: Oddity. (Perhaps a reference to David Bowie's 1969 masterpiece "Space Oddity"? It may very well be!)

Aside from the brilliant new name and banner, what else has changed? I doubt you'll be running into any Mr. Saturns, but the overworld is otherwise still (PK) rockin' those EarthBound vibes. Battles are where the significant alterations have been made — psychic abilities are hereby referred to as "ESP" rather than "PSI," and we are now treated to Phantasy Star-esque behind-the-back views of our heroes in action. (Sure, the screen may be crowded, but the additional art and animations ought to inject combat with plenty of exciting dynamism.)

The trailer concludes with a promise that Oddity will "be out when it's ready" and that we all ought to "relax 'til then." Yes, it seems that the wait continues without an end in sight — but at least the team is committed to the project no matter how many years it requires. Also, given that the game has severed its ties to the Mother IP, we've entered a timeline whereby a Switch port in addition to the planned PC release is not entirely unfeasible! Wouldn't you love for these hardworking boys and girls to get paid for their tireless efforts to make the world a little groovier? **— TONY**

Follow @OddityRPG on Twitter

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEXT ISSUE

We've had a vision! We can foresee that the original Xenoblade adventure is just about to be reborn in the form of **Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition**, and we want to properly prepare you, our fine readers, to revisit that epic quest. Or to experience it for the first time! If you've seen its hero Shulk in action in the Smash Bros. series and have always wondered where he came from, you'll soon have to wonder no more!

In addition to turning our attention back to one of the finest RPGs ever made, we'll also spend some time discussing its makers as well, celebrating the 20th anniversary of Monolith Soft! Why, we might just have a whole role-playing game appreciation party. Join us!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #46:

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES: DEFINITIVE EDITION

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

TRIALS OF MANA

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: **BREATH OF THE WILD 2**

SHANTAE AND THE SEVEN SIRENS

TOKYO MIRAGE SESSIONS #FE ENCORE

THE DARK CRYSTAL: AGE OF RESISTANCE – TACTICS

THE HISTORY OF **MONOLITH SOFT**

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: RESCUE TEAM DX

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE FIGHTERS PASS VOL. 2

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SPORTS STORY

DOUBLE DRAGON & KUNIO-KUN RETRO BRAWLER BUNDLE

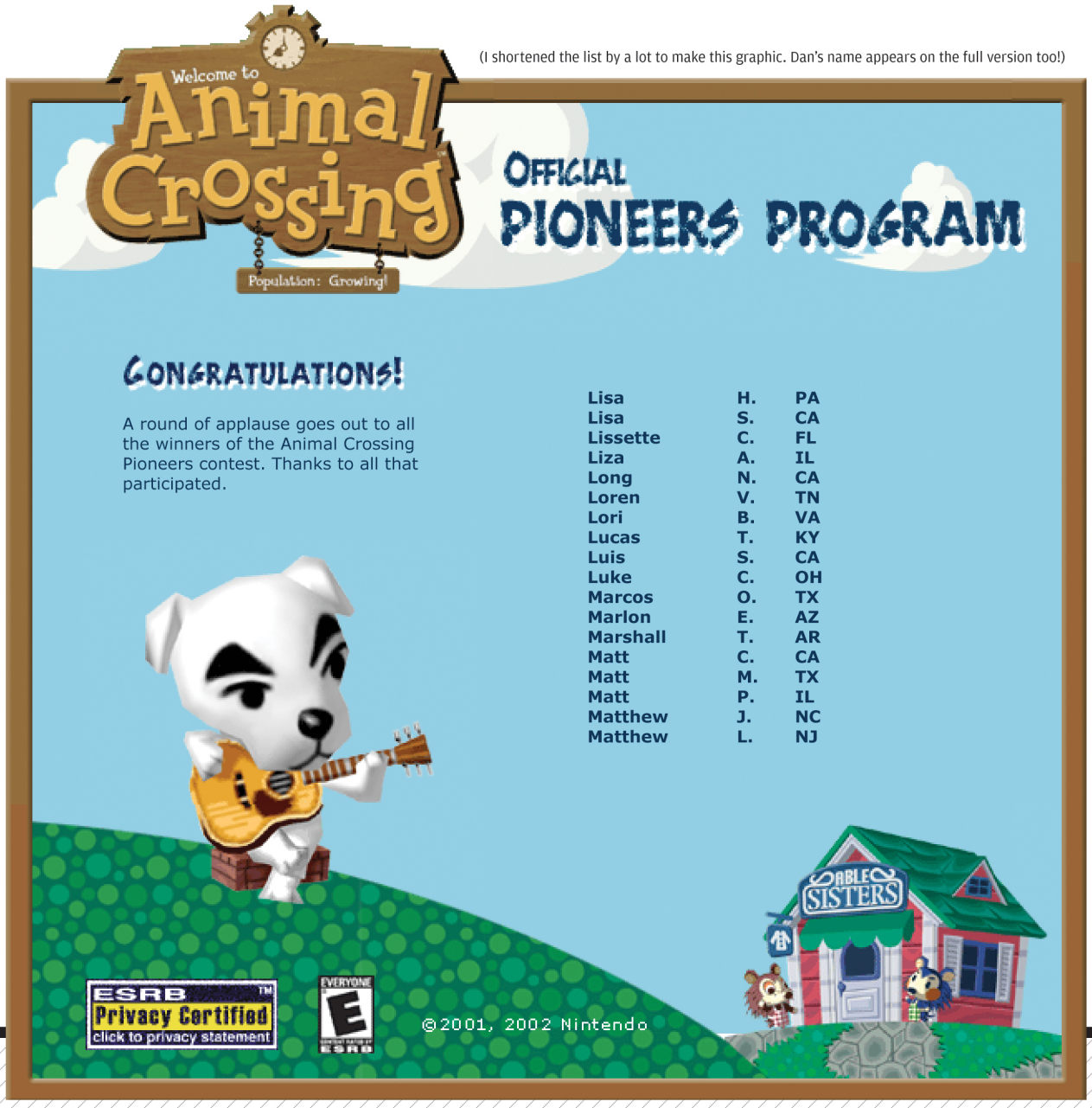
AND MUCH **MORE!**

MAY/ JUNE 2020

PIONEER PRIDE

LISTEN, I DON'T want to brag, but it's important that I establish my AC pedigree. You need to know that when you're reading my opinion on anything related to Animal Crossing, you're getting the perspective of an Official Pioneer! Way back in August 2002, the month before the first Animal Crossing game went on sale in North America, Nintendo held a contest. A total of 125 teams of two would win early copies of the game before anyone else — they just had to submit 50-word essays explaining why they should be chosen! I joined forces with my brother Dan and penned an epic ode to our Nintendo fandom. And, well, we won! We got two copies of the game and some other promo goodies shipped to us a few weeks before the game officially went on sale to the public. It was a great moment for Dan and I as he founded Pezburg and I established NF City, and we got to feel like true trailblazers! If you dive into the depths of the Internet Archive, you can still find the page announcing the victors. Lucas T. from KY — that's me! **— LUCAS**

(I shortened the list by a lot to make this graphic. Dan's name appears on the full version too!)



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